

Doctoral Thesis

Plantation Struggles in Kenya:  
Trade Unionism on the Land  
1947-63

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2000

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## Abstract

The following work examines the making of Kenya's plantation proletariat and its social physiognomy in Thika and Kiambu districts from the late forties to the mid sixties. The work proceeds from the *value relations* of the coffee commodity on the world market and then to *production relations* within the districts concerned. Select estates within these areas are then identified in order to trace the workings of the *law of value* from its appearance as prices in the world market to the origins of *surplus value* and struggles over its extraction within the workplace.

The increased rate of exploitation throughout the plantation economy is then identified as the principal subterranean impulse to workers' recourse to trade unionism. There followed a qualitative leap forward as workers on the plantations and in industry moved into simultaneous strike actions in response to the announcement of preparations for African majority government. The formative years of the plantation unions are then reviewed in conjunction with strikes on the coffee estates. The reciprocal impacts of plantation and industrial strikes are emphasised throughout. These have been reconstructed to reveal an uneven yet combined movement of workers in both rural and urban locations, though one which suffered from bureaucratic deformations and distortions. As such this project has revealed a crucial moment in the making of the Kenyan working class along with its inherent contradictions.

In opposition to this development, attempts by the State to impose severe conditions on union recognition are examined. The development of corporatism has been considered as part of attempts by the state to control and emasculate the developing working class and its organisations. How and why the bureaucratisation of the plantation unions occurred is investigated as well as analysing its impact on coffee workers during the course of decolonization. The emergence of a syndicalist trend of rank and file, often errant, agitators and the weaknesses of this tendency related to the ideology which it shared with its bureaucratic opponents is also identified. The role of the Kenya Federation of Labour as the principal agency for the incorporation of the plantation unions into the state apparatus is then traced to the advent of the omnibus Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union. This was paralleled by an opposed trajectory emanating from workers themselves which reached its highest point in the 1962 General Strike. The insoluble problems of arbitration which heralded the unstable foundations of post independence corporatism are then investigated. Overall, the thesis points to a fifth column of labour lieutenants that was pivotal to the bourgeois nationalist transmutation of Uhuru.

The work also gives clause and subclause attention to the principal ordinances in the context of a wide range of disputes to show how these operated in a concrete setting. The research brings the period 1959-63 into focus, when these laws were being broken on a widespread scale as result of spontaneous strike waves. The associate problems which rent conciliation machinery are contextually discussed throughout. The thesis shows that a defining characteristic of the period was the inability of the labour bureaucracy to restrain and arrest successive strike movements on the plantations and elsewhere in accordance with the rules of conflict resolution defined by colonial labour laws.

Finally, the thesis has sought an epistemological break with existent work in the field and for this reason has identified the philosophical roots of past contributions and drawn upon Marx's dialectical *method* to help resolve the problems of analysis and interpretation that have held back previous research.

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## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. David Anderson for invaluable guidance and advice whilst I was preparing this thesis. Without his prompting I might never have applied for the Economic and Social Research Council Studentship that provided most of the resources to sustain this project. Thanks are also due to Dr. Dana April Seidenberg formerly of Syracuse University and the Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi and to Professor Chris Youe of Memorial University, Newfoundland, for their interest and encouragement. The staff of the Kenya National Archive were accommodating, though I would like to especially thank the archivist Richard Adumbani for his focused energy. Throughout the fieldwork I was fortunate to have Miss Terry Wairimu as my research assistant. I would like to thank her for reliability, persistence, professionalism and camaraderie. The indefatigable Wilson Maina Macharia, former detainee and assistant general secretary of the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers, formerly the Domestic and Hotel Workers Union, visited me in the archive every week to check up on my progress and to discuss the files. I would also like to express my grateful thanks to the Union for welcoming me to Kiburi House and for its continuous hospitality throughout my fieldwork, as well as for introducing me to C.O.T.U. leaders. As to old friends Doreen and Ray Meyninck, their doors were always open. It was John O'Connor who originally introduced me to Kenya back in 1991 and again helped to make my stay a pleasant one by accommodating me at his house in Karen surrounded by a menagerie of tamed wildlife. I would also like to express my indebtedness to Dr Judy Shaw and the nursing staff at Nairobi Hospital for giving me their care and concern during a serious illness. Countless people helped with the arduous daily treks from Karen to Nairobi, though special thanks are due to the ecologist John Watkin who went out of his way. For the gruelling return journeys, I took my life in my hands along with thousands of other commuters, for which I have only Kenya Bus Service and Stagecoach to mention. For keeping me company in the archive, Hamidin al Hamid was a source of discipline and inspiration. I would also like to mention my good friend Sada Reddi of the University of Mauritius whose empirical intuition grounded me when necessary and with whom I have shared a mutual concern for plantation workers. Special thanks are due to Suzanne Bouchard who was on hand to help with my computer illiteracy and to type some invaluable spreadsheets. I would also like to appreciate the interest shown by Mr Dennis Akumu, former secretary general of C.O.T.U., Mr Francis Atwoli, general secretary of the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union, Mr Wasike Ndombe, general secretary of the Kenya Local Government Workers' Union, Mr Wafulla Wa Musamia, general secretary of the Kenya Quarry and Mine Workers' Union and Mr Frank Muriithi of the Kenya Railway Workers' Union

[Workers' Education Department]. My fieldwork in the U.K. was much less exciting though no less fruitful with thanks due to staff at the Public Records Office, Rhodes House Library in Oxford, the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick and especially to Christine Coates at the University of North London's T.U.C. Archive. The great unsung heroes of the piece are my wife Louise and our two daughters Rebecca and Miriam who supported me throughout and to them I owe a great debt of time. As to my detractors, the words of the great Florentine are now mine:

"Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti"

*Clacton-on-Sea, September 2000*

*Dave Hyde*

## *Preface*

This project has multiple inspirations. It would not have happened at all but for a lengthy period in Kenya that I had intended as one of life's interludes, but it was not to be. For several years I was privileged to be able to live what can best be described as a charmed existence on a shamba situated between the foot of Ngong Hills and Nairobi National Park. The pace of life was slow, the days long and invariably sunny, the hills and plains rugged and awesome. The surrounding world gradually caught up with me and on occasions rudely interrupted my peace and calm. Whilst the barbarous realities endured by ordinary Kenyans became ever more imposing, it was their humour and resolve in the face of the odds that humbled and inspired. Only those preoccupied with the Karen Club and performing conscientious service for the national bourgeoisie refused to be moved by such resilience in face of the harshest exploitation on earth.

At that time the organised labour movement had barely stirred from its long slumber, though was beginning to loosen its straitjacket and made its presence felt as part of the generalised political awakening that accompanied the 1992 presidential election. This was a watershed and from then on nothing would or could ever be the same again. Several years later, during the course of my fieldwork, everyone and everything I had known before had moved on and changed irrevocably. The last vestiges of the old life that I had savoured had gone for good. Though I mourned for the passing of what had been, this was overtaken in my mind by an excitement at what was developing. The trade unions had literally pushed to the forefront as bank staff, nurses, teachers and workers at Kenya Co-operative Creameries moved into prolonged national strike actions. Other sections of society were also disturbed, though the ferment amongst students and the jacquerie actions of small scale coffee farmers were specially marked.

It was a reading of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's 'Petals of Blood' that initially enabled the author to focus the questions tackled in this thesis. The narrative saw Ilmorog, in just twelve years, pass from tribalism to the first yearnings for socialism. This swift development made it possible for Ngugi to telescope into individual experience developments which in countries like Britain have taken hundreds of years. I had enjoyed my retreat but grew uneasy with 'Cambridge Fraudsham' and its parvenus. As time went by I broke away and grew closer to Karega and Wanja. Whilst the form was the novel, the content of history and its demands upon the author were made conscious through it.



*Abbreviations:*

A.W.F.	African Workers Federation
C.B.D.	Coffee Berry Disease
C.B.K.	Coffee Board of Kenya
C.I.R.O.	Chief Industrial Relations Officer
C.M.B.	Coffee Marketing Board
C.O.T.U.	Central Organisation of Trade Unions
C.P.	Central Province
C.P.A.	Coffee Planters Association
C.P.W.U.	Coffee Plantation Workers Union
D.H.W.U.	Domestic and Hotel Workers Union
E.A.F.B.C.W.	East African Federation of Building and Construction Workers
E.A.R.H.	East African Railways and Harbours
E.A.S.	East African Standard
E.A.T.U.C.	East African Trade Union Congress
F.K.E.	Federation of Kenya Employers
G.A.W.U.	General Agricultural Workers Union
I.C.A.	International Coffee Agreement
I.C.F.T.U.	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
I.C.O.	International Coffee Organisation
I.F.P.A.W.	International Federation of Plantation and Allied Workers
I.R.O.	Industrial Relations Officer
K.A.N.U.	Kenyan African National Union
K.A.W.C.	Kenya African Workers Congress
K.C.G.A.	Kenya Coffee Growers Association
K.C.S.U.	Kenya Civil Servants Workers Union
K.D.C.W.U.	Kenya Distributive and Commercial Workers Union
K.E.M.	Kikuyu, Embu and Meru
K.E.W.U.	Kenya Engineering Workers Union
K.F.L.	Kenya Federation of Labour
K.F.R.T.U.	Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions
K.L.G.W.U.	Kenya Local Government Workers Union
K.N.A.	Kenya National Archives
K.N.F.U.	Kenya National Farmers Union

K.N.U.T.	Kenya National Union of Teachers
K.P.A.W.U.	Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union
K.S.G.A.	Kenya Sisal Growers Association
K.S.L.W.U.	Kenya Shoe and Leather Workers Union
K.T.F.W.U.	Kenya Timber and Furniture Workers Union
K.U.P.T.E.	Kenya Union of Posts and Telecommunications Employees
L.C.	Labour Commissioner
L.D.A.R.	Labour Department Annual Report
L.O.	Labour Officer
M.R.C.	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick
P.L.O.	Provincial Labour Officer
P.R.O.	Public Records Office
S.C.P.W.U.	Sisal and Coffee Plantation Workers Union
S.E.A.	Sisal Employers' Association
S.J.C.	Standing Joint Council
S.L.O.	Senior Labour Officer
S.P.W.U.	Sisal Plantation Workers Union
T.A.W.U.	Transport and Allied Workers Union
T.P.W.U.	Tea Plantation Workers Union
T.T.W.U.	Tailors and Textile Workers Union
T.U.C.	Trade Union Congress [U.K.]
U.N.L.	University of North London

*Map of Central Province, 1962*

## 1. Perspectives and Refutations

This study concerns the making of Kenya's plantation proletariat, focusing on its emergence and formative struggles on the coffee estates of Thika district from the late colonial period to the mid sixties. The internationalisation of the domestic economy, falling commodity prices and the vagaries of world markets were the primary determinants of the crisis within Kenya's plantation economy, but the emphasis of this study will be upon the working conditions and struggles of African labourers. The minutiae of the labour process has been studied in this connection to reveal the imposition of a more intense and prolonged working day, which was the principal impetus to the expansion of trade unionism amongst workers on the land. This study is therefore primarily an examination of the beginnings of union organisation on the plantations in response to harsh productivity drives, low wages and picking rates, draconian workplace discipline and punitive contracts.

This thesis also considers the impact on the labour market of the detention of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru [K.E.M.] workers during the Emergency [1952-60], the overcrowding and social differentiation within the reserves and the emergence of a landless wage dependent proletariat. Uneven and yet combined strike movements are shown to have been central to the wider context of the independence struggle, which threatened to alter the balance of class forces determining its course.

In examining the history of the Coffee Plantation Workers Union [C.P.W.U.] and its successors, these concerns have enabled an overdue appreciation of the principal role and contradictions of trade unionism in the movement towards independence. The development of a trade union bureaucracy<sup>1</sup> of professional officials has demanded special consideration. Given that this stratum was groomed by the Labour Department to police its own rank and file, the thesis evaluates how successful union officials were in facing both ways at once in performing contradictory roles, both on behalf of their members and of the state.<sup>2</sup> This raises a range of questions. How did the C.P.W.U. and its successors handle their duality of being simultaneously vehicles of working class resistance and agencies of accommodation? What was the nature of those pressures for adaptation that cast the Union's leaders

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<sup>1</sup> R.Hyman and R.H.Fryer, 'Trade Unions and Bureaucratic Control'. In T.Clarke and L.Clements [eds.] *Trade Unions under Capitalism* [London, 1977].

<sup>2</sup> The author has attempted to put the Marxist theory of the state to work throughout this thesis. For a fundamental discussion of the principles of this theory see V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution, Collected Works Volume 25* [Moscow, 1975] and F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Marx-Engels Selected Works* [Moscow, 1973].

as handmaidens of the state? What conflicts did this generate within the Union itself? And further, what role did the labour bureaucracy play in persuading workers to delay their expectations of independence?

Directed by the Kenya Federation of Labour [K.F.L.], C.P.W.U. officials worked hard to restrain unrest on the coffee estates. Their shortcomings in the eyes of their members were glaring since they were mostly unable to deliver even minimum demands, which left workers often worse off than before or without jobs at all. This study also unveils the role of the K.F.L. in lifting a comprador bourgeoisie into power when its political representatives were too weak to scale these heights unassisted. Overall, the bureaucracy of the K.F.L. and its affiliates became handmaidens to a bourgeois nationalist transition. Imposing a tight rein on its constituents, the K.F.L. leadership worked to arrest the movement beneath it at rare moments when it showed signs of going beyond the limited horizons of a fledgling bourgeois democracy, a recast variant of the old regime prescribed by the colonial power itself. This was one of the most important prerequisites for the mould of independence that followed. Only after such a betrayal had occurred was the African bourgeoisie able to secure itself. Overall, the study reveals a surge forward by the organised working class which reached out for jobs and land by going on strike to take its independence in response to the announcement of transition to African majority government in January 1960. This development revealed a 'working class movement' germinating within the womb of what passed as a 'national movement' that then became more divided within itself.<sup>3</sup> Union leaders attempted to 'reconcile' these antagonisms at the expense of the jobs and wages of their members.

### *The Importance of Marx's Scientific Method*

The following work is also a plea for a serious study of Marx's epistemology and its implications for historical research in Africa. While this is currently unfashionable, it should be noted that what went out of fashion was a variant of 'Marxism' which attempted to apply the results of Marx's work whilst neglecting the method he developed to achieve them. Hence this work's departure from the struggle of the African proletariat to make itself<sup>4</sup> versus attempted social engineering by the state to mould an 'imagined' working class. Here workers were to be cast as a 'factor' of production, an atomised mass of individual bearers of the commodity labour power. The outlook of the colonial

<sup>3</sup> The author has drawn on Marxist historical writing which has given prominence to the dialectic of nation and class. See especially K.Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848-50* [Harmondsworth, 1977] and Trotsky's, *The Permanent Revolution* [New Park, 1973].

<sup>4</sup> 'Making, because it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.' E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* [Harmondsworth, 1974] p.9.

state administration was positivism, where 'in itself'<sup>5</sup> each section of workers, each trade and craft, each estate and workplace were discrete subjective entities with no necessary connections, except those imposed by the mind. Whereas sectionalism expressed a working class divided and compartmentalised by the capitalist division of labour, the emergent proletariat was struggling to become a class 'for itself', independently cohering its variant and divergent parts into a movement as a whole.<sup>6</sup> This is what this thesis means by its recurrent references to *revolutionary potential* and *revolutionary trajectory*. The principal contradiction of trade unionism was that it both represented trade and craft divisions, and a stage towards overturning such divisions as workers sought to connect and cohere themselves.

Trade union leaders sought to uphold this fragmentation and a major preoccupation of the foregoing work is to analyse the reasons why. In this regard the writings of Leon Trotsky are an indispensable body of insight into the behaviour of bureaucratic agencies within the workers' movement, principally of the Stalinist and Social Democratic variety, upon which this work has sought to draw. His analysis of the contradictions between the national bourgeoisie, the working class and the peasantry and the political implications of their relationship in anti-imperialist struggles are equally essential to any appreciation of the role of trade unions in the struggle for national liberation.<sup>7</sup> Amongst the countless comments and asides throughout Trotsky's voluminous correspondence, articles, pamphlets and books, *Trade Unions within the Epoch of Imperialist Decay* and *Marxism and the Trade Unions* represent priceless theoretical gains in dealing with these problems.

The literature on African labour movements has overwhelmingly<sup>8</sup> avoided such a perspective and has thus become preoccupied by the apparent dividedness amongst African workers. The essence of the latter's increasing, though contradictory unity, has thus been overlooked. What characterises the

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<sup>5</sup> *An sich* ['in itself'] and *für sich* ['for itself'] are essential concepts of materialist dialectics and recur throughout this thesis. 'In itself' expresses the separation and detachment of things from their interconnectedness in the objective world which facilitates their potential for development. This is both an enforced condition and a habit of thought. Its opposite 'for itself' refers to a phase of development when a given subject draws on the connections around it to assert itself through movement and change. A 'thing for us' summarises the cognition of actively grasping the 'thing in itself' in order to make it work on our behalf. For the primary literature on these conceptions see F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring* [Moscow, 1975] and *Dialectics of Nature* [London, 1960]; V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* [Moscow, 1977].

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term 'as a whole' throughout this work carries the specific meaning of completeness, embracing all the properties, aspects and relations of an object in motion and change. In this sense the notion of 'whole' approaches the notion of 'concreteness'. For positivism, the 'whole' means little more than a fixed array of things that are discrete and unique unto themselves, whose external connections and similarities can be subjectively arranged to give it an 'identity' or an 'ethnicity'.

<sup>7</sup> L.D. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, New Park 1973.

<sup>8</sup> See bibliography. Works on South and West Africa have only been fleetingly reviewed for the purposes of this study, though the same crisis of methodology seems to obtain in this literature.

field of study in Kenya is any trace of serious engagement with the labour theory of value. Superficial attempts to apply this have been made without any apparent awareness of its concomitant methodology.<sup>9</sup> This thesis has sought to address this weakness, though the work here can only be taken as a beginning and a stepping stone for more practical work with the dialectical method in conjunction with the sources.

To illumine these questions, this reconstruction of plantation struggles has proceeded to determine what 'in itself' is the disparate raw material of an indeterminate external world of which historical sources can only be a partial and often vulgar reflection. Reliance on files from the Labour Department, especially the reports from local labour offices and their inspectorate, means to recognise that this material was generated from the practices of monitoring, surveillance and conciliation. Though particular reasons and causes for individual disputes were often deftly appreciated, field officers were unable by virtue of their training,<sup>10</sup> instinct and disposition to identify the essence beyond the appearances of workplace conflicts or to comprehend the strikes as a whole. That has been the task of this thesis. Reading these sources against the grain means first and foremost to identify the nature of the grain we are up against and, with the aid of the Marxist method, to study its implications throughout.

Our task has been to make these sources a 'thing for us', by determining their connections and exposing their causal laws of movement. Such an approach takes the interconnected external world of 'being in and for itself' as primary and beyond the historical sources whilst reflected in them. This is the only guard against lapses into idealist explanation which begin from consciousness and the written word generally. That being is primary<sup>11</sup> and predominates over its predicate thought, and that they can never be treated as equal, has led us to begin with the unconscious content of consciousness as it were, the crisis on world commodity markets and their unfolding impact on Kenya's plantation economy. On this terrain, social relations between producers were simultaneously disguised and represented by the value relations between commodities. Hence whilst our departure has been from the sphere of circulation and the appearance of value relations, we then proceed to production

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<sup>9</sup> See for example S. Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and the African Response, 1895-1975* [Harlow, 1982]; G. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: the Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* [Yale, 1980]; F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* [Yale 1987] and *Decolonisation and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* [Cambridge, 1996]

<sup>10</sup> U.N.L./T.U.C./HD/8798K: Colony and Protectorate of Kenya Civil Service Commission, Labour Department Recruitment Pamphlet No. 7 [Nairobi, 1959].

<sup>11</sup> K. Marx, Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, *Marx-Engels Selected Works* [Moscow, 1973] pp. 180-4.

relations and the labour process. Statements, descriptions and observations from participants and commentators have all been treated on this philosophical foundation. Analysis and synthesis have been attempted by drawing on the evidence of this crisis and on the recorded experience of the C.P.W.U. and its successors as reflected through the prism of mostly official sources. Material emanating from the union itself has been reviewed only insofar as this has found its way into official files. Because the recorded voice of plantation workers and union officials themselves is exceptional, for authenticity we have allowed this to surface wherever possible, structuring the thesis to accommodate this voice.

In order to comprehend the immediacy of events on the plantations themselves it has been necessary to begin at the abstract<sup>12</sup> level of the world nature of Kenya's plantation crisis that constituted the essential content of experience for all the antagonists. Our departure has been from the universal<sup>13</sup> in the form of the world market, an interconnected material unity with lawful relations between all its parts, which posited the contradictions of crisis and struggle in Kenya itself. Previous attempts at giving emphasis to the world market have been rejected on the spurious grounds that they involve imposing a western model on Africa that does not fit. A search for something peculiarly African has been urged to clear the way for an exclusively African narrative. This has stressed genuine African peculiarities as 'things-in-themselves' to the exclusion of the combined

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<sup>12</sup> The concepts of 'abstract' and 'concrete' recur throughout this work. What is abstract means here theoretical cognition that has been arrived at as the prior result of assimilating the complexity of what is concrete and then reproducing its essential aspects and relations in consciousness. The movement from the abstract to the concrete here presupposes an original movement from the concrete to the abstract. It is essential therefore for what follows, to distinguish between the sensual concrete as the starting point of the investigation, from the mental concrete which is its end product. In short, our departure in presentation is the summary of our prior research. Lenin makes the point that, 'Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract - provided it is correct - does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a law of nature, the abstraction of value, etc. in short all scientific [correct, serious, not absurd] abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely.' V.I. Lenin 'Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic', *Volume 38 Collected Works* [Moscow, 1972], p. 171.

<sup>13</sup> 'Not merely an abstract universal, but a universal which comprises in itself the wealth of the particular', G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* cited in V.I. Lenin, 'Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic', *Volume 38*, p. 99. The amassing of local evidences should never be confused with analysis and synthesis that has universal foundations. The analysis here then begins from the whole and proceeds to the part, though this is only enabled by an empirical beginning with a wealth of particulars. Our concepts express interconnectedness, so while the universal includes and is expressed through the particular, no particular can exist apart from the universal. These relationships can only be apprehended because of their prior existence in nature. The procedure here does not gather evidences and then form general concepts of them, but understands that the unity of the particular and universal is the very condition of our cognition. Hence Engels tells us in *Anti-Duhring*, that it is '...self evident that the products of the human brain being in the last analysis also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature's interconnections, but are in correspondence with them.' [p. 49] Of course the question of correspondence is a scientific question bound up with a theory of reflection founded upon the unity of theory and practice.



nature of world development that these express. In short, exaggerated emphasis on the part has been made to make it greater than the whole in order to prescribe a uniquely African labourer.<sup>14</sup>

These issues were embedded in the 'Kenya Debate'<sup>15</sup> with its focus on the class structure of the Kenyan countryside and its problems of development. Presumption aside, the problems which wrought the contributors concerning capital accumulation were related to the fact that the process itself was misconceived insofar as the emergence of the modern working class and its implications were absent from the exchanges even though it was at the centre of all of Marx's own work on the subject. This omission underlaid the purpose of what transpired to be a vain search for some alternative path of autonomous capitalist development. A similar trend of 'Legal Marxism' was taken to task by Lenin for deploying Marxist terms to explain the necessity of capitalist development whilst avoiding analysis of the relativity and short-lived nature of this phase given its late arrival with a small but concentrated modern working class that moved quickly into revolution [1905]. Lenin's focus on the agrarian question and the social differentiation of the Russian countryside<sup>16</sup> anticipated the preoccupations of the 'Kenya Debate' and became one of its reference points.

### *Kenyan Labour History*

Prior to the 1960s, interest in the field was dominated by reports and publications emanating from the Colonial Office<sup>17</sup>, the Labour Department, successive commissions of inquiry and the Fabian Colonial Bureau.<sup>18</sup> Liberals and reformists were generally worried over the worst excesses of colonialism and for the continued existence of the Empire. These concerns were awakened by the first serious expressions of spontaneous working class militancy in Kenya and other colonies during the thirties. From then on the Colonial Office charged its officials to devote increasing attention to urban conditions, the housing question, wage levels and the cost of living. In short, all the associated problems of how to mould an industrial working class whilst avoiding concomitant expressions of its revolutionary potential.

<sup>14</sup> For a sophisticated variant of this trend see R.D.Grillo, 'The Tribal Factor in an East African Trade Union', in P.H.Gulliver [ed.] *Tradition and Transition in East Africa* [Los Angeles, 1969]; see also R. Scott, 'Trade Unions and Ethnicity in Uganda', *Mawazo* 1, June 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Various authors, *Kenya: The Agrarian Question, Review of African Political Economy No.21* [London, 1981].

<sup>16</sup> V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Collected Works Volume 1 [Moscow, 1965].

<sup>17</sup> C.H.Northcott, *African Efficiency Labour Survey*, Colonial Research Publications No.3 [1949]; Major G. St.J.Orde Browne, *Labour Conditions in East Africa*, Colonial No.193 [1946].

<sup>18</sup> Rhodes House Library ACJ/14/4: A.Creech Jones, *Labour in the Colonies*, Fabian Research Bureau Quarterly [Summer, 1938]; *Colonial Labour Problems*, Fabian Colonial Bureau, [1945]; M.Cowen and R. Shenton, 'The Origin and Course of Fabian Colonialism in Africa.' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4 [1991].

Some of these concerns were reflected in the first serious scholarship within the field. Alice Amsden's study 'International Firms and Labour in Kenya, 1945-70'<sup>19</sup> prioritised the role of the Federation of Kenya Employers [F.K.E.] in casting the system of industrial relations that emerged in the twilight years of colonial rule. Amsden emphasised the F.K.E.'s strategy to facilitate the 'enlightened' management policies of metropolitan industrial capital. What needs to be stressed is that these practices were the outcome of past experiences in Britain, and that attempts to replicate a tradition of class collaboration in Kenya were uneven and fragile given the approach of independence. Essential to our project here, is to show that the ground upon which collective bargaining was based was rough and uneven, and marked by prolonged and intensive periods of conflict. The incidence and impact of trade union struggle below the rivalries within the leadership were mostly absent from Amsden's account. This was also the case with Clayton and Savage in their 'Government and Labour in Kenya',<sup>20</sup> which chronicled the evolution of colonial labour policies framed largely in terms of the personalities of state officials and trade union leaders. Above all, and as any reading of the Labour Department's annual reports shows, their account betrays an often crass acceptance of the latter's standpoints at face value.

These problems resurfaced in R.Sandbrook's 'Proletarians and African Capitalism'<sup>21</sup> that erected a flawed but dominant paradigm which other entrants to the field have been unable to address. The focus of this study was on the increasing incidence of factional struggles within the labour bureaucracy during the approach to independence and thereafter. This gave undue emphasis to tribal divisions at a time when these were in crisis and breakdown. Ethnic differences and interpersonal rivalries were treated as 'things in themselves', and without necessary connections to the dramatic changes in Kenya's political economy occurring at the time. Sandbrook's attempts to analyse the contradictions of trade union leadership by giving disproportionate consideration to ethnicity as a 'thing-in-itself' must now finally be rejected. Although this work appeared in the mid-seventies, its conceptions have experienced something of a rebirth in the form of 'imagined communities'<sup>22</sup> and 'cultural creations'<sup>23</sup>, where ideology and subjective 'identity' have been portrayed as of primary or equal importance to the objectivity of social and production relations. It is for this reason that this thesis needs to disassociate itself with the vulgar idealism of 'Proletarians and African Capitalism.'

<sup>19</sup> A.H.Amsden, *International Firms and Labour in Kenya: 1945-70* [London, 1971]; 'Trade Unions and Politics in Kenya.' *Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, unpublished seminar paper [1966].

<sup>20</sup> A. Clayton and D. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963* [London, 1974].

<sup>21</sup> K.R.J. Sandbrook, *Proletarians and African Capitalism: The Kenyan Case, 1960-1972* [Cambridge, 1975]; *Politics in Emergent Trade Unions: Kenya 1952-70*, D.Phil. Thesis University of Sussex [1971].

<sup>22</sup> B.Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [London,1991].

<sup>23</sup> E.J.Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-91* [London,1995].

This analysis gave false credence to efforts by the colonial state and its successor to reinforce such divisions at a time when working class unity was in the ascendant. Furthermore, Sandbrook's work inadvertently suggested that African workers, still divided along tribal lines, were not ready for trade unions. The internecine rivalries and squabbles amongst trade union leaders were seen as reflections of the relative backwardness, supposed inexperience and essential divisions amongst African workers themselves. No sustained attempt was made to link these appearances to attempts by the government to impose such fragmentation. Such conceptions awarded a caretaker role to the trade union bureaucracy that was supposed to be guiding workers as yet unready for trade unionism. This gave attribution to further assumptions that the working class was jumping ahead of itself and skipping intermediate stages of development which, if only it exercised restraint, would enable it to overcome its alleged immaturity. An impetuous child, but the infant no less of Orde-Brown's 'African Labourer'<sup>24</sup> in need of paternal guidance was presented under a new, more sophisticated guise.

Sandbrook's highlighted tensions between Luos and Kikuyus within the trade union leadership were much more to do with intra-bureaucratic rivalries linked to the detention of an overwhelmingly Kikuyu leadership during the Emergency and their replacement by Luo leaders who belonged to a period of trade unionism when the movement was on its knees. This stored away problems that resurfaced during the movement's recovery as K.E.M. workers re-entered the labour force. This was further complicated by the emergence of new leaders from amongst the detainees and youth, untainted by the setbacks of the fifties, who were inevitably more militant. Ethnic rivalries were the appearance given by the contradictions and unevenness of class formation in which tribal differences coincided with gaps and inconsistencies in the division of labour. So that while coffee workers in Central Province were overwhelmingly Kikuyu, their union leadership contained a disproportionate number of Luos, a legacy of the previous decade.

Sandbrook's sociological account<sup>25</sup> began not from the development of the productive forces and class formation, but from 'clientalism'<sup>26</sup>, an idealist conception of power struggles amongst trade union leaders and nationalist politicians. Union leaders became entwined in a post-colonial corporatist apparatus that functioned increasingly according to patronage, in a society where clientalism in various forms was rife. Sandbrook is surely right when he tells us that to 'the extent

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<sup>24</sup> G. St.J.Orde Brown, *The African Labourer* [London, 1967].

<sup>25</sup> The precursor of the method and style of this work was W.H.Friedland, *Vuta Kamba: The Development of Trade Unions in Tanganyika* [Stanford, 1969].

<sup>26</sup> R. Sandbrook, 'Patrons, Clients, and Unions: The Labour Movement and Political Conflict in Kenya.' *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol X, No.1, March 1972.

that clientalism vitiates class consciousness among the underprivileged and promotes intra-class rather than interclass conflict, it is a support in the inegalitarian status quo.<sup>27</sup> This was grounded not on tribal affiliation but on a carefully constructed system of political integration and control crafted by the colonial state over many years. The patronage relationships in the trade union movement upon which bureaucratic factionalism thrived were contingent upon the intermediate role and petty-bourgeois physiognomy of the trade union bureaucracy generally. This stratum was driven by the scent of gain and its inclination to pick the crumbs from the master's table, and when there were not enough to go round a bitter round of power struggles invariably erupted.

Trade union positions were coveted because they offered their holders considerable opportunities for personal and professional advancement. Immediately after independence, many branch and national union officials were drawn into administrative positions in industry and the state apparatus. Others ventured into politics and business, cutting their ties with the labour movement entirely. The roots of corporatism went deep into the workplace, as it was common for even junior branch officials to be promoted at work after demonstrating their deference. On occasions, they in turn could influence the promotions of family members and supporters. Social parasitism in the form of 'clientalism', oozed from all pores of society, thriving on inequality, poverty and cultural backwardness.

In many ways Sandbrook's work was an apologetic description of this unbridled opportunism. In essence, competitive labour bureaucracies were at work seeking pragmatic agreements with the employers and the state that would give them captive memberships and a guaranteed source of financing secured by the 'check off' system. In characteristic idealist fashion Sandbrook embraced the appearances of trade unions as apriori structures which were inspired by the Labour Department. This took the department's reflex actions at face value, which were motivated by a fear of unions being organised from amongst workers themselves beyond the control of the state. Kenya's unions were then presented as entirely top-down affairs with the rank and file as voiceless tragers<sup>28</sup> or vectors of the labour bureaucracy itself. With such an intense focus on the machinations of trade union officials, it should come as little surprise that workers struggles during this period had little place in this account. These have only partially surfaced in subsequent work which, despite the best

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<sup>27</sup> R. Sandbrook, *Proletarians and African Capitalism*, p.21.

<sup>28</sup> L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital* [London, 1970], p.180. Althusser's 'notion' of men as *trager* or carriers of functions allocated to them by the market is one which he shares with vulgar political economy. Here we mean the trade unions as imposed structures in which workers are compelled to become bearers of the reasons and necessities of capital.

intentions, has been unable to make a clean break with this perspective. It is fundamentally misconceived to view the working class through the prism of a labour bureaucracy that seeks to dominate it, a consideration that has informed the reading of the sources throughout this thesis. Sandbrook's ahistorical rationalism collapses as soon as the detailed action of class forces, shaped by their historical experience, is appreciated. Edward Thompson has shown us that the category of experience 'however imperfect it may be, is indispensable to the historian, since it comprises the mental and emotional response, whether of an individual or of a social group, to many interrelated events or to many repetitions of the same kind of event.'<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, whilst Thompson's handling of 'experience' was an important step forward, it left unattended the greater question of what was essential about the thing experienced. This must lead the historian to reflect the law governed external world beyond experience, upon which the latter is grounded. Once acknowledged these laws then need to be studied and their implications appreciated in the source material.

Stichter's work on labour markets and production relations marked a shift in treatment of the labour question towards the grassroots in an attempt to examine the molecular processes of working class experience.<sup>30</sup> This was followed by Cooper's research on Mombasa dockers which went further to plot more sensitively forms of action and consciousness that developed below the control and beyond the awareness of the state.<sup>31</sup> In these accounts workers were no longer the inert passengers they had been in previous contributions. Nonetheless, this work was limited by a major unresolved confusion which the foregoing work has sought to address. There was a case of mistaken identity involving the labour aristocracy and the trade union bureaucracy.<sup>32</sup> Whilst the skilled proletariat and union functionaries both occupied a more privileged position within the working class, the latter embraced the politics of class collaboration in their practice of administering workers struggles. Though a coincidence of interest between the two was sometimes apparent, in the later part of our period [1959-64] they more often confronted each other as opposites. So that while the labour bureaucracy drew closer to the state, the more privileged sections of workers such as railmen, teachers and civil servants, hitherto the most conservative and quietist, moved into confrontation

<sup>29</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory: or An Orrery of Errors* [London, 1979], p.199.

<sup>30</sup> S. Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya*.

<sup>31</sup> F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*.

<sup>32</sup> S. Stichter, 'Imperialism and the Rise of a 'Labor Aristocracy' in Kenya, 1945-70', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Volume 21 1976-7, pp.157-78; G. Arrighi, 'International Corporations, Labour Aristocracies, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa,' in R.I. Rhodes [ed.], *Imperialism and Underdevelopment* [New York, 1970]; J. Saul, 'The 'Labour Aristocracy' Case Reconsidered', in Sandbrook and Cohen [eds.] *The Development of an African Working Class* [London, 1975], pp.303-10.

There was some attempt to confront this problem in P. Mwangi Kagwanja, Kwame Nkrumah's Theory and Practice of the Labour Movement and their Manifestations in Kenyan Trade Unionism to 1966, M.A. Thesis Kenyatta University [1992], pp.13-23.

with their state employer. The conflation of the upper layers of the working class with the bureaucratic stratum in the trade unions has lent credence to the assumption that the factionalism and corruption amongst the latter were an essential reflection of the character of the former. This underlaid Fanon's reactionary thesis<sup>33</sup> that the labour aristocracy had been bought off and had everything to lose in a struggle for national liberation.

The source of these shortcomings in the work of Frederick Cooper are rooted in his essentially idealist method which has lately been subjectively seeking for 'the changing definition of the possible'<sup>34</sup>, and 'toward understanding the boundaries of the possible - the interaction of bureaucracy, politics and labour movements - at the end of the colonial era.'<sup>35</sup> These are boundaries of 'realism' that Cooper is mistakenly prepared to accept for his own parameters of historical inquiry. This is a 'history' of the 'accomplished fact' in which the immediate reality is always given predominance. The result is a subjective co-ordination of experiences that explains away the manner in which the system adjusts itself according to the possibilities on offer. What Cooper avoids throughout is an abstraction of what is essential in the movement of the whole which produces this experience.<sup>36</sup> This becomes clearest in Cooper's appreciation of the role of Tom Mboya. The 'Mboyas' he tells us, 'were not tools of the state'. Whilst allowing that Mboya 'had indeed been a protégé of leading state officials at a time when they needed an antidote to Makhan Singh and others regarded as trade union demagogues...', the importance of this insight is diminished because Mboya used 'his credibility with Government officials to gain a good settlement for Mombasa's workers', and for proving 'an effective nationalist leader while Kenyatta remained in jail.' In Cooper's account, the 'experience' of partial gain in Mombasa and elsewhere elevates the 'Mboyas' to the effective heroes of the piece.

Cooper gives further praise for Mboya's 'sense of the frightening quality of urban disorder', which 'enabled him to argue to great effect - in labor negotiations or at a constitutional conference - if not me, the rabble.'<sup>37</sup> Here workers themselves are reduced to the auxiliaries of history, their role as conscious actors decreased as they are 'thought' and 'performed' elsewhere by union officials who then become the principal agency. Indeed, the 'Mboyas' believed that they were the union and that the self activity of workers was secondary to their brokerage. This assumes the working class as an

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<sup>33</sup> F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [Harmondsworth, 1963], pp.86 and 101.

<sup>34</sup> F.Cooper, *Decolonisation and African Society*, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p.5.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 2, 'Theoretical Perspectives on the Crisis'.

<sup>37</sup> F.Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*, p.271.

object 'in itself', with its power necessarily mediated through the trade union bureaucracy which Cooper accepts as the proxy of workers interests. Like those of Althusser before them, these assumptions of Cooper and Sandbrook are imbued with 'the same "latent anthropology", the same ulterior assumption about "Man"- that all men and women [except themselves] are bloody silly.'<sup>38</sup> Whilst Cooper shows that workers in Mombasa did assert themselves in class ways in several major struggles from the late thirties, he overrules their significance in an apology for the labour bureaucracy. No doubt Cooper would protest, but the 'Mboyas' were 'labour lieutenants of capitalism.'<sup>39</sup>

For Cooper, Mboya's opportunist role 'worked' because he achieved some short term advantages for the dockers. No doubt this was the best that could be attained given what was 'on the table' at the time, an experience repeated at Lancaster House. Here the historical appraisal of Mboya is reduced to a subjective matter of 'what works' under the circumstances. Political analysis then embraces the 'art of the possible', as all outcomes turn upon immediate and partial results. Just as Mboya brokers labour and capital, so Cooper brokers the law governed objective world and subject's response according to what fits at the time. In the absence of an analysis of the phenomenon of labour bureaucracy there are only 'good' or 'bad' historic individuals to fill the vacuum. This is a bad method since it involves separating out as 'thing in themselves' people who are in reality interconnected in law governed ways with other people. Cooper is a sceptic because he assumes that there can be no real knowledge of anything beyond the 'boundaries' of the possible which supposedly defines the limits of our sensory experience and facilitates the terrain of expediency. This may get us all through the day but when it comes to historical science this is out of court. The movement of matter is as law governed in history as it is everywhere else.

Whilst borrowing Marxist phraseology, the epistemological roots of Cooper's 'method' lie deep within the bourgeois philosophy of American pragmatism.<sup>40</sup> Insofar as it can be said to have a

<sup>38</sup> E.P.Thompson, *Poverty of Theory*, p.340.

<sup>39</sup> V.I.Lenin. Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, *Selected Works* [Moscow, 1975],p.175.

<sup>40</sup> Cooper's picking and choosing from ideas as diverse and opposed as Marxism and 'discourse analysis' is rooted in a tradition of eclecticism. The United States developed and modernised by borrowing techniques and accomplishments from Europe. A developed understanding of the theoretical struggle which had been necessary for these material gains to have been made has had no American tradition. Pragmatism recognises only the experience, opinions and practices of individuals apart from any connection to the law governed processes of nature and history they express. Following the French idealist Henri Bergson's stress that reality must be understood as a 'flux' of experience, resurrected by post-modernists as 'fluidity', pragmatism's chief proponent William James [1842-1910] proceeded to announce the abolition of the distinction between thoughts and objects and replaced them with 'experience'. And so, '...if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, or stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff "pure experience"...' Furthermore, James tells us that though 'one part of our experience may lean

method, pragmatism worships the 'accomplished fact', or data which is only observable or measurable in its immediately given form. This goes in hand with a deep insecurity when it comes to dealing with abstract general concepts such as the law of value, that is able to reflect law governed objectivity only because it 'departs from the immediately concrete.'<sup>41</sup> These are apprehended not in a direct and immediate way, but through abstraction from source material. This requires a theory of knowledge which grasps the objectivity of the external world beyond the sources. As 'facts' the latter are incomplete reflections of a whole series of interrelated processes as opposed to fixed and finished data.

Cooper uncritically accepts the 'facts' as given by experience. Change is then reduced to the interaction of fixed opposites that never interpenetrate and transform into one another except in the subjective realms of discourse.<sup>42</sup> This is the basis upon which Cooper's 'analytical' structure is built, held together by subjective 'opinion' or, as he puts it, 'intersections of European and African discourses'.<sup>43</sup> Put more simply, speech acts colliding with one another are the primary determinants of history. Cooper's use of the term 'intersection' is of course offered as a substitute for contradiction which as a formal logician, he sees as one that exists in terms only. This is debilitating for the historian, since contradictions in source material are the appearance given by objective contradictions which must be reflected and engaged with, a task which pragmatism disallows in its assumption that the objective law governed world external to consciousness is fundamentally impenetrable. The point here is that the pragmatist adapts to the surface appearance of sources,

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upon another part...experience as a whole is self contained and leans on nothing.' [William James, *Does Consciousness Exist?*, 1904]. Hence, for pragmatists like Cooper, 'experience' is a category that transcends the dichotomy between being and thought, theory and practice, subject and object.

<sup>41</sup> So that while the law of supply and demand coincides immediately with the world of exchange of commodities, the law of value can only be apprehended through abstraction since '...value is a category which dispenses with the material of sensuousness [i.e. departs from the immediately concrete] but it is *true* than the law of supply and demand.' [Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p.172]. This helps us to understand Marx's method of abstraction, how he was able to penetrate beneath the surface appearance of the immediately given facts. He could then show that the 'immediately given' mystified and obscured the real relations between producers which receive expression in the value form. In *Capital* Volume 1 [Moscow, 1959] and Volumes 2-3 [Moscow, 1971], Marx could only return to a detailed explanation of the movement of prices after many years of detailed abstract and analytical study where he was able to arrive at the concept of value. Hence value did not stalk around with a label attached to it, but was a social hieroglyphic. For a full discussion of these points see in particular V.I.Lenin, *The Philosophical Notebooks, Collected Works Volume 38*; E.V.Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays in its Theory and History* [Moscow, 1977]; E.V.Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Concrete and the Abstract in Marx's Capital* [Moscow, 1982]; G.Pilling, *Marx's Capital: Philosophy and Political Economy* [London, 1980]; R.Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's Capital* [London, 1977]; I.I.Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* [Detroit, 1972].

<sup>42</sup> For an attempted Marxist critique of the empiricist/pragmatist outlook see G.Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* [London, 1971].

<sup>43</sup> F.Cooper, *Decolonisation* p.5.



instead of struggling through these contradictory appearances to the essence they express.<sup>44</sup> What Cooper does is not to explain contradiction, but to explain it away so that the historian does not have to confront its methodological demands. Hence consciousness and practice are fused into an 'experience', that contains no inherent conflict. In any research involving 'labour' and 'capital', the role of contradiction is pre-eminent. In so far as Cooper recognises this, it arises out of conflicts between rival conceptions and utterances, but by no means does it designate contradictions which exist within things themselves. This refusal to recognise the necessity of objective contradiction means that the opposites are kept separate and their interpenetration into one another and transformation is disallowed. In short, no reflection of external development, or intervention to shape its course, can take place. Hence Cooper's work belongs to a historiography which is essentially preoccupied with the sectional divisions amongst workers, and with the forms and methods of state domination. This assumes that while these forms can be rearranged, the subordinate status of workers cannot be fundamentally altered.

Overall, Cooper's minimalist preoccupations ignore the objective laws of movement and change, and leave us confined to the shifting realms of appearance. This remains firmly within the boundaries of Sandbrook's paradigm in lending a guardian role to the labour bureaucracy and legitimising its intermediate role 'in between' the major classes which is taken to be as good a place as any other. The objectivity of a law governed external world challenges historians to appreciate what was necessary at the time and how the various actors measured with this. The minimalist perspective on the other hand is riddled with apology, in this case for a labour bureaucracy that strove to arrest workers struggles when they showed signs of going beyond the 'possible' boundaries of bourgeois nationalism.

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<sup>44</sup> Pragmatism drew heavily on the work of David Hume [1711-76] and Immanuel Kant [1724-1804]. Both maintained that we can only ever know appearances and that while the external world 'may' exist, we can have no certain knowledge of the 'thing in itself'. Kant makes this most clear, 'I say things as objects of our senses existing outside of us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their appearances, that is, the representations which they may cause in us by affecting our senses.' [I.Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Library of Liberal Arts Edition, p.36]. Furthermore, 'we know nature only as the totality of appearances, that is, of the representations in us; and hence we can only derive the laws of their connection from the principles of their connection in us, that is, from the conditions of their necessary union in one consciousness which constitutes the possibility of experience' [*Prolegomena*, p.66]. The upshot of Cooper's Kantian subjectivism is the denial of objective causal laws in history and everywhere else. Causality becomes instead a subjective category of the mind.

Subsequent work<sup>45</sup> has been unable to address these weaknesses and beaten a retreat from the experiential departure. In lending emphasis to what that state was doing about labour during this period, a primary focus on the incidence and character of labour struggles themselves has been avoided. These interpretations have gone much further in their adaptation to the 'accomplished fact' and awarded a monolithic and all pervasive character to the late colonial state in Kenya at a time when its strength and superiority were waning in face of the generalised upsurge of trade union militancy that accompanied the transition to independence. We argue on the contrary, that the state machine was able to weather crises of instability only because its weaknesses were cloaked in the shadows of their former strength, and that those in opposition were either unable or unwilling to get beyond this, a feature which has also marred the literature in the area.

### *Colonial Corporatism*

Fears that a developing working class in the colonies was beginning to find its own feet were aroused by strikes in India and the Caribbean during the early to mid thirties. The Colonial Secretary Sydney Webb<sup>46</sup> issued his 'Passfield Memorandum' of September 1930 to all colonial governors, urging the passage of legislation to give legal rights to trade unions. In this Webb drew attention to the dangers of an alliance between trade unions and nationalist organisations, 'I recognise that there is danger that without supervision and guidance, organisations of labourers without experience of combination for any social and economic purpose may fall under the domination of disaffected persons, by whom their activities may be diverted to improper or mischievous ends'.<sup>47</sup> The Colonial Office Labour Committee was then set up to oversee this work. Its aim was to insulate unions from politics by formulating laws which would delimit union activity into narrow craft based concerns. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act [1940] later ruled that 'no territory might receive aid unless it had in force legislation protecting the rights of trade unions'.<sup>48</sup> This was a recommendation to forestall the independent development of trade unionism. The British government's commitment to trade unionism was a pledge to corporatist<sup>49</sup> unions which while decorated with the veneer of

<sup>45</sup> P.T. Zeleza, *Dependent Capitalism and the Making of the Kenyan Working Class during the Colonial Period* [Ph.D. Dalhousie, 1982]; R.Ajulu, *Capital, the State, and the Working Class: Emasculation and Control of the Kenyan Labour Movement 1937-69* [Ph.D. Sussex, 1989]; I.G. Shivji, *Law, State & The Working Class in Tanzania* [London, 1986].

<sup>46</sup> See J.M. Winter, 'The Webbs and the Non-White World: a case of Socialist Racialism'. *Journal of Contemporary History* 9 [January, 1974], pp.181-92.

<sup>47</sup> I. Davies, *African Trade Unions* [Harmondsworth, 1966] p.38.

<sup>48</sup> D.J. Morgan, *Official History of Colonial Development Vol.1: The Origins of British Aid Policy, 1924-45* [London, 1980], p.124.

<sup>49</sup> L. Panitch, 'Trade Unions and the Capitalist State', *New Left Review* 125, January/February, 1981; 'Recent Theorization of Corporatism: Reflections on a Growth Industry', *British Journal of Sociology* Volume 31

autonomy would serve as extensions of the state itself. To this end, Labour Departments were established in all of Britain's colonies<sup>50</sup> from the late thirties supported by an arsenal of draconian labour laws. These were framed through the process of sifting, selecting and synthesising from past legislation drawn from the experience of class conflict in Britain.<sup>51</sup> By 1942, the Colonial Labour Advisory Committee had been formed to watch over trade union development in the colonies. This brought together representatives from the employers and the British Trade Union Congress to cast the mould for corporatist unionism. As part of this, officials were seconded<sup>52</sup> from the T.U.C. to help establish and administer trade unions in the colonies, which it insisted 'should be non-political.'<sup>53</sup>

Britain's post-war economic crisis made these goals more urgent. This was dumped on the colonies as punishing surplus extractions were imposed to finance the war debt, close the dollar gap, support sterling and finance the costs of reconstruction at home. The concern for 'trade unionism' then, seems to have been predicated on the necessity for direct control and infusion of discipline into the workforce. In Kenya, this accelerated the pace of class formation, provoked workers struggles and made the prescription for 'sweetheart' unions a burning issue. This also coincided with a transformation in the form of the state from paternal and indirect rule into a style of authority which combined dictatorship and repression with evolving corporatist structures in an admixture rationalised as 'closer administration'.<sup>54</sup>

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[June, 1980], pp.159-87; 'The Development of Corporatism in Liberal Democracies', in P.C.Schmitter and G.Lehmbruch [eds.] *Trends Towards Corporatist Intermediation* [Beverly Hills, 1979], pp.119-46.

<sup>50</sup> Rhodes House Library ACJ/14/4: W.Ormsby Gore circular, *Despatch from the Colonial Secretary to the Governors of British Dependencies*, 24 August, 1937; *Labour Supervision in the Colonial Empire 1937-43*, Colonial Office, May 1943. In 1935, the Colonial Secretary Malcolm Macdonald urged that specialist labour department's be established in all of Britain's colonies to supervise labour legislation, regulate labour conditions and generally to oversee the relation between 'master and servant'. This task was taken up by his successor W. Ormsby Gore and by 1941 over thirty colonies had established labour departments.

<sup>51</sup> B.C.Roberts, *Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth* [London, 1964], pp.259-336.

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/290/ Trade Union Appointment of Trade Unionist to the Colonial Labour Department, 1941-8; K.N.A./ABK/8/291/Trade Union Specialist in Labour Department, 1947-9. These files deal with James Patrick's appointment to Kenya's Labour Department as 'Trade Union and Labour Relations Officer'.

<sup>53</sup> J.Meynaud and A.Salah Bey, *Trade Unionism in Africa: A Study in its Growth and Orientation* [London 1967], p.26; see also P.Weiler, 'Forming Responsible Trade Unions: The Colonial Office, Colonial Labor, and the Trades Union Congress', *Radical History Review* [1984], pp. 367-392; I.Davies, 'The Politics of the T.U.C.'s Colonial Policy', *Political Quarterly* 35 [January-March, 1964]; P.S.Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-64* [New York, 1975]; Marjorie Nicholson, *The T.U.C. Overseas: The Roots of Policy* [London, 1986].

<sup>54</sup> B.Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* [Nairobi, 1990], p.301.

Corporatism, though a feature of all capitalist states, found its most consummate expression in Europe's fascist regimes of the inter-war years.<sup>55</sup> These states attempted, at least in the realm of appearance, to dissolve class antagonisms and 'de-proletarianise' the workforce. Always a manufactured fiction of equal partnership, these dictatorships drew heavily on the practices of class collaboration. Through the parallel development of employers associations and what passed as labour unions, they attempted to reconcile these 'factors of production' by absorbing their conflicts into the state apparatus itself.<sup>56</sup> The Italian Charter of Labour was admired by politicians from all parties in Britain as a good model of relations between workers and employers, and considered by some to be worth emulating. Contained within this identity though was an important difference. Whereas fascist corporatism was founded upon the violent defeats and absorption of long established labour movements, the aim in Kenya was to erect a corporatist apparatus which would catch spontaneity in the 'net', by castrating all signs of independent working class organisation before they had time to find their feet.

Corporatism was imposed through successive legislation in Kenya, but most importantly by the Regulation of Wages and Condition of Employment Ordinance [1951], the Trade Union [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance [1948], the Trade Union Ordinance [1952] and the Essential Services [Arbitration] Ordinance [1950] which banned the right to strike in an ever widening schedule of 'essential services'. This legislation was facilitated by the repressive conditions of the Emergency and constituted a legal dictatorship over labour. According to Clayton and Savage, Labour Commissioner Frank Carpenter was determined to 'clip the wings of the trade union movement'.<sup>57</sup> The Trade Union Ordinance<sup>58</sup> was founded upon his ideas to refit the corporatist straitjacket which had come loose with the union militancy of the previous decade. The ordinance reaffirmed earlier legislation going back to 1937 only it was more draconian in the powers it gave to the Registrar, who could now de-register, suspend, supervise and inspect unions' accounts and membership lists with no

<sup>55</sup> See especially D. Guerin, *Fascism and Big Business* [New York, 1973]; R.A. Brady, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* [London, 1937].

<sup>56</sup> The corporate state was described in the most fetching terms by Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists: 'Class war will be eliminated by permanent machinery of government for reconciling the clash of class interests in an equitable distribution of the proceeds of industry. Wage questions will not be left to the dog fight of the class war, but will be settled by impartial arbitration of State machinery; existing organisations such as trade unions and employers federations will woven into the fabric of the Corporate State, and will there find with official standing not a lesser but a greater sphere of activity. Instead of being the general staff of opposing armies, they will be joint directors of national enterprise under the general guidance of corporative government.' Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* [London, no date], pp. 28-9.

<sup>57</sup> Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 370.

<sup>58</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: 'An Ordinance to provide for Staff Associations, Employee's Associations and Employee's Organisations, for the Registration and Control of Trade Unions, and for matters connected...' [1952].

constraints. Despite its pretences, aim of the ordinance was to sideline trade unions by encouraging the proliferation of 'staff associations' on the spurious grounds that these would prepare workers for 'fully fledged'<sup>59</sup> unions. These organisations could not strike or collect dues and were fundamentally creatures of employers. Taken as a whole, these laws were the essential pillars of a corporatist superstructure that facilitated 'class collaboration' for remainder of the colonial period, surviving in various permutations to this day. With this in place disputes with the employers became simultaneously conflicts with the state, prompting its intervention into even relatively minor conflicts. Corporatism became further entrenched by the establishment of works councils<sup>60</sup> within each firm up to industry wide Joint Industrial Councils. It should be noted that Tom Mboya, as secretary of the Nairobi Municipal Staff Association, cut his teeth in this set up and sought to imprint its parameters on the struggles to come.

During the Emergency's first years a pattern emerged whereby 'almost all' reported strikes occurred in undertakings where there was neither established joint consultative machinery, nor registered agreements of terms and conditions. Thereafter, the Labour Department devoted a 'great deal of time'<sup>61</sup> to the establishment of works councils or joint staff committees. By the end of 1958, there were 92 constitutionally founded joint negotiating and consultative bodies covering 218,400 workers of all races as compared with 184,800 the previous year. In addition, some 40,000 workers in the plantation industries were covered by estate committees, though these functioned on an ad hoc basis. These structures proved incapable of resolving all but the most minor problems. This was revealed during the course of 1957 and thereafter, when statutory provisions for the settlement of trade disputes were invoked more often. For example, disputes covered by the Essential Services [Arbitration] Ordinance [1950] were almost all settled by compulsory arbitration.<sup>62</sup> The Labour Department believed that the major cause behind the increasing number of strikes lay in the imperfections of existing negotiating machinery. In the worst cases, boards of inquiry were established to overhaul this 'defective' apparatus.<sup>63</sup> The rush to establish negotiating structures to

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<sup>59</sup> Rhodes House Library / FCB 118/1: *Opportunity in Kenya*, Fabian Colonial Bureau [1953], p.29.

<sup>60</sup> The Labour Department pursued something of a crusade to have them established. Works councils dealt with bread and butter issues 'closely connected with the stomach or personal comfort', though Thika's labour officer admitted that they formed a 'safety valve'. Overall, they were intended both to disguise the imposed wishes of the employers as negotiated decisions and to serve as a bypass to trade unionism. For plantation workers, there was little provision for any such machinery to resolve grievances apart from what passed as estate committees or 'kiamas', ad hoc barazas and the more simple expedient of 'explaining to the Bwana'. K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1960.

<sup>61</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/ 77: Labour Department Annual Report [L.D.A.R.], 1952.

<sup>62</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/92: L.D.A.R., 1957.

<sup>63</sup> These were set up to revise negotiating and consultative machinery in the tobacco, brewing and bottling industries, the quarrying and sand industries, and the petroleum and oil industries.

facilitate collective bargaining and bring a halt to the rising number of disputes was fraught with problems from the outset. To tame the workforce during a period of crisis with little previous preparation was one of the most testing episodes of late colonialism.

Wage increases effected throughout the period 1957-63 were largely the result of government inquiries and awards rather than negotiation. These gains were a consequence of the potential for mass strike action and the position in the economy of the workers involved rather than the expertise of trade union leadership. Whilst workers claimed the unions as organs of their own struggle, trade union officials worked with the Labour Department to channel this external movement into the collapsing structures of conciliation. The most characteristic feature of industrial relations was the inability of trade union leaders to control the rank and file and work with the employers to effect a system of collective bargaining.<sup>64</sup> Overall the expansion of trade unions as agencies of class compromise was encouraged by the state under circumstances where erstwhile control mechanisms were breaking down under the pressure of irreconcilable class antagonisms.

### *Trade Unions and the Struggle for Independence in Kenya*

The arousal of the organised working class in Kenya occurred during the thirties, though it was not until the post-war strike wave [1947-52] that it became a force to be reckoned with. The movement took its pedestrian steps during the twenties as trade unionism emerged amongst Asian artisans on the railways and in the printing trade.<sup>65</sup> The movement quickly made the leap from narrow craft based forms of organisation towards *General Unionism*, first in the Workers Protection Society and then in the Labour Trade Union of East Africa founded in 1934. During these years the workers movement was led audaciously by the Indian artisan printer Makhan Singh who organised a conscious turn towards African workers in an attempt to overcome craft and racial divisions within the developing working class.

The generalised strike wave that swept through Africa from the mid to late forties inspired a further leap forward in Kenya where general unionism combined with syndicalism<sup>66</sup> and elements of

<sup>64</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/96: L.D.A.R., 1959.

<sup>65</sup> The Railway Artisan Union was founded in 1922 and the Typographical Association in 1929.

<sup>66</sup> B.Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-14* [London, 1977]. Gives an account of the 'rank and file' movements in the British trade unions. While these did not exist in Kenya, the idea of 'One Big Union' gave impetus to the founding of the Labour Trade Union of East Africa. The syndicalist movement in Britain was imbued with ideas of industrial unionism and direct action. In Kenya the idea of a general strike rather than industry wide strikes took a foot hold early on because there were fewer craft based divisions amongst workers. Those that existed coincided with racial divides which the L.T.U.E.A. aimed to supercede by recruiting Asian and African workers to its ranks.

nationalism. Both 'union leaders and militants during this period showed a strong syndicalist preference for omnibus organisation and the General Strike'.<sup>67</sup> This became a principled strategy to achieve minimum trade union demands linked to a maximum programme of distinctly nationalist goals. An unprecedented upsurge occurred with the general strikes in Mombasa [1947]<sup>68</sup> led by the African Workers Federation and in Nairobi [1950]<sup>69</sup> by the East African Trades Union Congress [E.A.T.U.C.] triggered by the arrest of its leaders, Makhan Singh and Fred Kubai for organising an unregistered trade union. What has been called the 'Nairobi General Strike' was in fact a near insurrectionary struggle that took in all of the main towns and their hinterlands, with reverberations as far as Kampala. When this struggle was at its most all embracing, the strike committee 'decided that as sufficient protest and demonstration had taken place it was now time to call off the strike.'<sup>70</sup> This decision was taken at a crucial moment when the strike had already ripened into a political struggle with the state and showed some signs of maturing into a revolutionary confrontation. Dragged to defeat by the shortcomings of leadership, the trade unions were virtually disabled by the vicious state repression that followed. What began as an urban led anti-colonial struggle with organised labour at the helm, was then disorientated into the rural areas to become a forest insurgency.

The militant syndicalism of the movement during this period whilst a strength, was also a weakness since it left workers struggles confined to economic issues. No demands for a labour party as a political wing to the movement were ever raised and whilst the E.A.T.U.C. made a rhetorical commitment to immediate national independence, it confined its political struggle to critical support for the constitutional reformism of the Kenya African Union [K.A.U.]. The E.A.T.U.C. led by Bildad Kaggia<sup>71</sup> and Fred Kubai held the movement in a subordinate role, 'as a ginger group to prod the K.A.U. into more dynamic political action'<sup>72</sup> at a time when the latter's influence was on the wane. Despite the tension between those who wanted independence sooner rather than later and those trying to find a place for themselves under colonialism, in ideological terms there seemed little to separate the most deferent constitutionalist from the militant trade union leader.

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<sup>67</sup> B.Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya*, p.326.

<sup>68</sup> P.T.Zeleza, 'The Moral Economy of Working Class Struggle: Strikers, the Community and the State in the 1947 Mombasa General Strike', *Africa Development* Vol.XX, No.3 [1995], pp51-87.

<sup>69</sup> D.N.Hyde, *The Nairobi General Strike 1950*, M.A. Dissertation, S.O.A.S.[1996].

<sup>70</sup> M.Singh, *History of Kenya's Trade Unions to 1952*, p.277. According to Makhan Singh's account, by its ninth day on May 24th, the General Strike had been underway in Mombasa, Kisumu, Kakamega, Kisii and Nakuru for two days and in Thika, Nyeri and Nanyuki for three days. On Singh's estimates over 100,000 people were involved.

<sup>71</sup> B.Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom* [Nairobi, 1975].

<sup>72</sup> Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p.328.

This militant phase<sup>73</sup> was brought to a definitive close by the Emergency.<sup>74</sup> The movement was decimated by Operations 'Jock Scott'<sup>75</sup> and 'Anvil'<sup>76</sup> as thousands of union members were arrested and detained<sup>77</sup>, while others 'disappeared' altogether.<sup>78</sup> During 'Operation Anvil' in April 1954 a merciless and punishing setback was inflicted as virtually the entire urban workforce in Nairobi was detained, at least 35,000 K.E.M. workers in all. The trade unions were thrown into disarray as almost the entire leadership was swept into detention.<sup>79</sup> Whilst prior to the Emergency the trade unions had claimed a membership of 60,000, by 1955 this had fallen to 'some' 7,600.<sup>80</sup> The traditions represented by these unionists were, at least for the time being, cleared away allowing the cautious and law abiding to fill the breach.<sup>81</sup> In an attempt to survive the repression the unions regrouped within the Kenya Federation of Registered Trades Unions [K.F.R.T.U.]<sup>82</sup>, which became a virtual creature of the Labour Department.

With the A.W.F. and the E.A.T.U.C. banned the state was able to regain the initiative by encouraging the proliferation of employer controlled staff associations and works councils as a substitute for trade unions. By the mid fifties the Labour Department was investing its efforts into laying the ground for a new system of industrial relations sought by international firms seeking to establish themselves in Kenya.<sup>83</sup> To this end the department worked to appropriate the forms of trade

<sup>73</sup> Stichter, 'Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: the Militant Phase', in Gutkind, Cohen and Copans [eds.] *African Labor History* [Beverly Hills, 1978], pp.155-74; 'Workers, Trade Unions and the Mau Mau Rebellion', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 9 [1975], pp.259-70.

<sup>74</sup> F.Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* [Nairobi, 1990]; T.Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau* [Nairobi, 1993]; D.W.Throup, *The Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* [Nairobi, 1988]; G.Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* [Oxford, 1997].

<sup>75</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/5: Various correspondence gives details of trade unionists detained as a result of 'Jock Scott'.

<sup>76</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/4: Various correspondence relating to Anvil repression details the impact of arrests including the loss of members and income.

<sup>77</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/2: The problems facing the labour movement are revealed in various correspondence between the K.F.R.T.U. and the I.C.F.T.U., especially arrests of members and officials, the restrictions on movement inhibiting organising activities and the difficulties of fundraising.

<sup>78</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/7: I.C.F.T.U. Bulletin 'Trade Unionist Shot at Work' and various correspondence relating to the murder of Jonathan Njenga on 24.4.54.

<sup>79</sup> U.N.L./T.U.C./DT/445: *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*, Colonial Office, May 1960, pp.255-9. Apart from 'Jock Scott' and 'Anvil', arrests occurred throughout the Emergency. During April 1954, 56 union officials were detained. Particularly affected were the so called Mau Mau unions, the Transport and Allied Workers Union and the Domestic and Hotel Workers Union some of whose leaders had been members of the *Kiama kia Wiyathi*.

<sup>80</sup> U.N.L./T.U.C.: East African Royal Commission Report, p.49.

<sup>81</sup> See R.Sandbrook, *The State and the Development of Trade Unionism*, in G.Hyden, R.Jackson and J.Okumu [eds.], *Development Administration: The Kenyan Experience* [Nairobi, 1970], pp. 252-95.

<sup>82</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/136 /Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions, 1952; K.N.A./ABK/8/298/ K.F.R.T.U.; K.N.A./ABK/8/139/K.F.R.T.U., minutes of meetings 1954; K.N.A./ABK/8/140/K.F.R.T.U., Press Releases and cuttings.

<sup>83</sup> Amsden, *International Firms*.



unionism already embraced by the emergent working class during the earlier period and to reshape them into narrow based industrial unions that could work with the new companies. It should be re-emphasised that Kenya's trade unions had already transcended purely craft based concerns during the thirties to embrace the general unionism that came powerfully into its own during 1947-50. Here workers showed signs of moving beyond sectional bargaining over the 'wage contract'<sup>84</sup> towards confronting the employers as a whole. The significance of the general strikes in Mombasa and Nairobi was that the consciousness of the workers concerned had shifted from considering their sectional relationship with individual employers towards understanding this relationship in its totality. These were rare moments where workers were able to some extent penetrate beyond the false appearances of the wage form. Hence the political drive by the state to reimpose separatist craft divisions as a means of depoliticising the developing working class and arresting the emergence of class political awareness.

With the trade unions forced into semi-legality, the state took advantage to fit a legal straitjacket and to oversee their bureaucratisation. This was largely facilitated by the Trade Union Ordinance which permitted general secretaries to be appointed from outside the industry concerned and insisted that leading officials had to be literate in English.<sup>85</sup> This requirement seems to have been consciously calculated to promote the emergence of a layer of trade union leaders drawn from clerical rather than from labouring ranks. In this the state was serving as midwife to the birth of a trade union bureaucracy they could do business with. This was further aided by the banning of African opposition parties which left the petty bourgeoisie politically homeless. Deprived of political expression and held

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<sup>84</sup> The *wage form* is an illusory appearance given by the value of labour power which is mistaken as the value of labour in the process of circulation and exchange. Testifying to the objectivity of these illusive appearances, the worker does get paid around the value of the commodity he sells, that is according to the laws of commodity production. Marx's analysis moves from the realm of appearance where equal exchange takes place, to its essence that lies in the process of production. As he makes clear, these illusions arising from within the sphere of circulation are the foundation of bourgeois ideology: 'This phenomenal form which makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all juridical notions of both labourer and capitalist, of all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists.' *Capital* Volume 1, p.540. Trade union consciousness, even at its most militant, is an essential reflection of this 'phenomenal form'. Struggles over wages are limited to the process of circulation, where the wage contract is the result of a commercial bargain between individual workers, or groups of workers and their respective employers. Hence the requirement for analytic inversion, which moves from value relations, or the appearances of circulation, and proceeds to the anatomy of the social relations of production. This means that the analysis must move from a consideration of relationships between individuals to that of the relations between classes, of which the former are a function. The 'apologetic shifts' Marx refers to applies to much of the literature on Kenya's labour movement.

<sup>85</sup> Clayton and Savage, p.371; M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, Section 29 [1] [b]. The Registrar had virtual power to determine who could or could not take office in the labour movement. Unions had to seek the Registrar's permission for the offices of branch secretaries to be filled by people who were not actually employed in the industries concerned.

back by rigid ceilings on racial and social mobility, the ordinance seemed to be inviting elements from this layer to make their way in the trade union movement as administrators and negotiators. Formal training to bring forward this bureaucracy began with James Patrick's 'Trade Union Lecture Course'<sup>86</sup> organised by the Labour Department during 1948-9, which focused entirely on union organisation and procedure. After its initial generosity in financing the Ruskin scholarships of Meschak Ndisi and Tom Mboya, the T.U.C. decided that the costs of bringing prospective officials to Britain for education were prohibitive and resolved to second British union officials to work with labour departments to oversee training programmes in the region.<sup>87</sup> The Jeanes School in Kabete was the site of the earliest courses [1954] to bring forward a stratum of union 'collaborators'. The school's trade union studies course marked a shift in emphasis from Patrick's classes, with lectures on 'joint consultation', 'wage determination', labour laws, economics and 'civics'.<sup>88</sup> After its 1951 mission to the region, the I.C.F.T.U. was also concerned that without facilities for training officials, Kenya's unions would fall prey to communism,<sup>89</sup> and later founded the Kampala Labour College [1960] to address these fears. The curriculum was geared entirely towards the 'arts and crafts' of bargaining, 'communication skills' and basic administration, all grounded on a pauper's broth of 'positive' economics.<sup>90</sup> This work was expanded when the Tom Mboya Labour College was established in Kisumu.

Nurturing a compliant layer of union officials binded into corporatist structures of arbitration was pivotal to the work of the Labour Department. Their training was to work for accommodation during a delicate period leading to decolonization. This course was not without its difficulties as the movement began to find its feet again as early as 1955<sup>91</sup>, with successful struggles for union recognition on the docks and in local government. These disputes helped to lift other workers to their feet and give new impulses to their energy. Whilst workers were evidently experiencing

<sup>86</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/77/General Correspondence relating to Patrick's Trade Union Lectures 1947-9; Rhodes House/MSS/Afri.596: J.Patrick, *The Organisation of a Trade Union* and *What is a Trade Union?* These pamphlets, were written by Patrick after being seconded to Nairobi as 'Trade Union and Labour Relations Officer'. They enshrined the T.U.C.'s corporatist ideology and its agenda for workers in the colonies; see also Rhodes House /FCB/118/1: James Patrick, 'Memorandum on Trade Unions - Development and Policy - Kenya'.

<sup>87</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/58/Trade Unions, 1948-67. Deals with the training of trade union officials and various scholarships; K.N.A./ABK/8/297/Proposal to send Africans to study overseas with T.U.C., 1956.

<sup>88</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/5: Jeanes School Prospectus of Trade Union Studies Course, 1954; K.N.A./ABK/19/20/ Resident School for Trade Unionists, Jeanes School, Kabete, 1954-6.

<sup>89</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/966.9/4: Letter for the I.C.F.T.U. to the T.U.C. regarding trade union advisors in East Africa, 7 April 1952.

<sup>90</sup> M.R.C./MSS/159/5/2/227: Kampala Labour College Progress Report, 1960.

K.N.A./ABK/10/3/ I.C.F.T.U. Labour College, Kampala, 1958-66.

<sup>91</sup> The watershed of 1955 seemed to mark the turn of the tide as the strike figures for 1955-60 almost repeat those for 1947-54 but within an ascending curve.

problems in maintaining their union commitments, loyalties were sustained as many turned to their organisations with repression related grievances as well as demands for better wages and conditions.<sup>92</sup> These issues surfaced at the May 1955 congress of the K.F.R.T.U. which also debated resolutions concerning the colour bar.<sup>93</sup> These questions became increasingly difficult to separate from a more nationalist position, which from then on transformed its K.F.L.<sup>94</sup> successor into the principal vehicle for the anti-colonial struggle, a role reinforced by the ban on African political parties.<sup>95</sup>

This trend stirred immense alarm, real and imagined, that the movement was already recovering itself and venturing into politics. This focused government anxieties that the K.F.L. was overstepping the demarcation line laid by the Societies Ordinance [1952] prohibiting it from becoming involved in colony wide political questions other than those connected to trade or craft issues. Fearing a resurgence of the strike movement that dominated the late forties, the Labour Department urged the K.F.L. to confine itself to industrial problems, while the Registrar threatened de-registration to disable its political involvement.<sup>96</sup> The federation was brought to heel after the intervention of Sir Vincent Tewson, when the T.U.C. general secretary secured an understanding with K.F.L. leaders in 1956 about the limits of their political involvement, beyond which they could not go without chancing the threat of de-registration.<sup>97</sup>

Whilst the department encouraged 'moderate' unionism, the federation was placed under closer surveillance. Its officials and affiliates were continually targeted by Special Branch and infiltrated by informers. Police raids to requisition membership lists, union accounts and literature were a regular occurrence. There was a particular fear that as Kikuyu detainees were released, the nationalist inspired syndicalism of the pre-Emergency period would resurface. Financially, the conditions of the

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<sup>92</sup> M.R.C. /MSS/292/967.1/2 and 1/3: Various correspondence relating to the problems of trade unions during the Emergency including the internment of trade unionists without trial.

<sup>93</sup> Makhan Singh, *The Crucial Years of Kenya's Trade Unions 1952-6* [Nairobi, 1980].

<sup>94</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/137/K.F.R.T.U. and the K.F.L., 1953-5;

<sup>95</sup> I.Davies, *African Trade Unions*, p.101; Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies* [London, 1960]. The parallel with reform movement in Britain must not go unmentioned. There was a strong community of aim between the organised working class and the disenfranchised industrial bourgeoisie in the campaign for the First Reform Bill [1832]. After the bill was enacted, the working class was left out in the cold with no gains at all. The fruit of this rupture was the emergence of independent working class politics in the Chartist movement. The latter's divisions between 'moral forcists' who emphasised constitutional action and bourgeois legality, and 'physical forcists' who promoted strikes and active protest were similarly replicated in Kenya's labour movement between those that embraced the politics of constitutional bourgeois nationalism and the more militant unions that leaned towards Mau Mau.

<sup>96</sup> East African Standard [E.A.S.], 25 February, 2 March, 3 March, 13 March and 5 April 1956. Threat of de-registration to K.F.L.

<sup>97</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/300/ K.F.L., 1956.

Emergency posed a catastrophe for the movement which was barely sustained by a monthly subsidy<sup>98</sup> donated for its own reasons<sup>99</sup> by the I.C.F.T.U. The latter's mission of 1957 reported that the movement was 'badly disorganised' and afterwards assigned a full time representative to Nairobi to assist its recovery. As to the British T.U.C. its support was grudging given the indignation of resolutions that poured into Congress House throughout the Emergency from trades councils and union branches<sup>100</sup> all over Britain condemning the repression in Kenya.

With so many K.E.M. in detention, workers from the Nyanza tribes, mostly Luo, now came forward to lead the movement. Tom Mboya, a Nairobi City Council sanitary inspector, personified the caution and moderation of union officials during the Emergency. This layer urged their members to obey anti-union laws and worked to prevent any rekindling of trade union militancy. Mboya's leadership of the K.L.G.W.U. recognition struggle was carried through without a single incident of strike action, as no stone was left unturned to prevent a struggle that went beyond the courtroom. It was this studious avoidance of independent action that drew this particular struggle out over many years. During its course Mboya became leader of the K.F.L. and intensified his efforts to cultivate all manner of allies from the Labour Department to judges, new employers, the Fabian Society, the T.U.C. and the American A.F.L.- C.I.O. Mboya gained much individual recognition abroad not least in the U.S., Britain and Israel where he was promoted with honorary degrees, courted with television interviews and showered with gifts. By discouraging the mobilisation of the working class Mboya was able to the same degree to extend his own 'independence' of action as a 'nationalist' politician.

At the core of Mboya's politics lay an acceptance of the prerogative of the colonial state to define the agenda for 'reform'. There was no timetable for a British withdrawal from Kenya and hardly a word about the right of nations to self determination was uttered. Mboya was elected to the Legislative Council on a programme of civil rights which echoed the ambitions of the African middle class by emphasising more participation within the colonial state. What was to be the character of

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<sup>98</sup> M.R.C./MSS/159/5/2/227: Correspondence concerning I.C.F.T.U. financial aid to African trade unions; K.N.A./ABK/10/2/ I.C.F.T.U., 1957-66.

<sup>99</sup> A.Carew, 'Conflict within the I.C.F.T.U.: Anti-Communism and Anti-Colonialism in the 1950s', *International Review of Social History* Vol.41 [1996], pp.147-81; P.T.Zeleza, 'Trade Union Imperialism: American Labour, The I.C.F.T.U. And the Kenyan Labour Movement', *Social and Economic Studies* 36 [1987], pp.145-70.

<sup>100</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1-5: Telegrams and letters of protest concerning the conditions and restrictions faced by Kenyan trade unionists, urged to Congress House take action. The correspondence from Croydon Trades Council and unions representing teachers, transport workers, electricians and engineers are most notable.

such inclusion? A glance at the franchise reveals an elitist electorate, drawn from the African bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie in the Nairobi area with 'loyalty certificates' attached to it. What kind of nationalism was it that allowed the colonial state and its advocates in London to have a determining say in the extent of political participation? Constitutional 'nationalism', which Mboya subscribed to, set its sights on capturing positions in the colonial state apparatus not tearing it down and erecting an alternative.

At this juncture we need to address Mboya's relationship to the K.F.L. of which he was the general secretary. With African politics illegal except at a local level and on a restricted franchise, 'nationalist' politics re-emerged to breathe within the K.F.L. In many ways this made African politics easier to control, since the K.F.L. was compelled to confine its political involvement under the constant threat of de-registration. Mboya used the K.F.L. as a springboard for his own political career by avoiding the question of independent political representation for the labour movement. As he moved further down the path of opportunism and careerism, his bureaucratic independence from the rank and file was strengthened. This enabled him to become unaccountable, and to have simultaneously a foot in both camps, the labour movement and bourgeois politics. Nonetheless, this balancing act was continually menaced by spontaneous strike Waves.<sup>101</sup>

During the course of 1958, Mombasa's docks became once again, following the 1955 dispute, the epicentre of workers struggles incurring a loss of over 42,000 man-days. The Kenya Bus Service Strike in Nairobi and Mombasa<sup>102</sup> became something of a milestone in the first political challenge to the state from a trade union since the Nairobi General Strike. This strike was significant because not only were these workers in a scheduled essential service prepared to challenge the Essential Services [Arbitration] Ordinance which banned their right to strike, but also to defy the advice of their union leaders to capitulate, and to rebuff an arbitration award. As a result of their stand, 290 strikers were arrested, charged and fined. This was the first occasion where 'such action had ever been taken in Kenya' and led to calls from the K.F.L. annual conference for a general strike 'should such a situation be repeated in future'.<sup>103</sup> During the course of the year the machinery of the Essential Services [Arbitration] Ordinance and the Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Enquiry] Ordinance was invoked on a record twenty-three occasions. The Government retreated in face of this groundswell with an

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<sup>101</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/299/ K.F.L., 1957.

<sup>102</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/10: K.F.L. Press Release 'Arrest of 290 Bus Strikers', 14 July 1958.

<sup>103</sup> E.A.S. 15 September 1958. K.F.L. Recruitment Drive.

amending ordinance under which the railways, posts and telegraphs, docks and passenger bus services were excluded from a revised schedule of essential services.<sup>104</sup>

The recovery of the labour movement reached new heights during the course of 1959 when six new unions were registered bringing the total to 25 with an official membership of nearly 40,000.<sup>105</sup> According to the Labour Department the 'major feature of the year was the spread of the trade union movement amongst African workers.'<sup>106</sup> This qualitative reawakening and recovery was especially marked by the inter-territorial East African Railway Strike<sup>107</sup> which began in the closing months of 1959 and continued intermittently until the summer of the following year. This had an immense impact and triggered an avalanche of strikes throughout the plantation economy. Above all else this simultaneous strike throughout the East African territories gave coherence, form and universality to working class struggles for the first time throughout the region.

The K.F.L. launched an organisation drive<sup>108</sup> with the appointment of full-time regional organisers, to assert its bureaucratic hold over the incipient movement and to beckon raw sections of plantation workers under its wing. The powerful surge forward by the organised working class unsettled the trade union bureaucracy and brought on a crisis within its ranks. A deep factional strife was evidenced leading to the first of a whole series of splits that were to fester over the oncoming years. In January 1959, Mboya was facing demands from other federation officials that he resign as general secretary over disquiet that he was spending too much time outside the colony and not enough on K.F.L. affairs. Divisions reappeared again in September when the K.F.L.'s Deputy General Secretary, Arthur Ochwada of the powerful E.A.F.B.C.W. took his union out of the federation and set up a rival body, the short lived Kenya Trades Union Congress.

Two rival wings emerged in the unions, that of a revived syndicalism based on the surge forward by workers generally and bureaucratic unionism administered by a layer of professional officials working within structures put in place by the Labour Department to arrest this anticipated movement. During 1960-7 few sectors of the economy were left untouched by strikes but those involving railmen, teachers, civil servants and local government workers were amongst the most

<sup>104</sup> P.R.O. / CO 544/ 94/58: L.D.A.R., 1958.

<sup>105</sup> This rose dramatically over the next few years. In 1963, there were 52 unions with a voting membership of nearly 156,000 or 29% of those in reported employment. In 1965, while the number of unions had fallen to 46, the membership increased to almost 295,000, 51% of the workers in reported employment.

K.N.A./Ministry of Labour *Annual Reports*, 1963-5: Government of Kenya *Statistical Abstracts*, 1963-5.

<sup>106</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/96: L.D.A.R., 1959.

<sup>107</sup> D.N.Hyde, *The East African Railway Strike 1959-60*, unpublished S.O.A.S. monograph [1997].

<sup>108</sup> U.N.L./T.U.C./ HD/6866K: 'Operation Expansion' and 'Report on the Plantation Unions', K.F.L. Annual Conference, 17-19th June 1960.

serious. They reflected a state apparatus undergoing multiple fractures making the transition to 'independence' a fragile one. This developing movement constantly challenged the trade union bureaucracy put in place during the Emergency which led to splits and factional rivalries within the K.F.L. and almost all its affiliates. A pivotal role in rescuing the state apparatus undergoing 'Africanisation' was played by Mboya who in May 1962 became Minister of Labour. He was the principal architect of the corporatist legislation that straitjacketed the unions after independence.

With the approach of independence, and undoubtedly hastening it, thousands of plantation workers pressed to join the K.F.L. aroused to political life by the terminal crisis of late colonialism. Four unions emerged for workers on sisal, tea, coffee and sugar plantations, together with a general union for those in mixed agriculture. Unprecedented years of recurrent strike waves ensued with coffee and tea workers following each other into struggle in a pendulum of action that alternated between Central province and the Kericho Valley. The initial peak of this movement was reached in March 1960 as wildcat strikes spread onto farms and plantations throughout Thika and Kiambu imperilling the coffee harvest. By September the epicentre of struggle had shifted to the Kericho Valley where a two week general strike involving over 20,000 workers crippled the country's tea production.<sup>109</sup>

Even more ominous was the combined strength of the rural and industrial unions united in the K.F.L., since this contained a revolutionary potential that promised to go far beyond the issues of wages and conditions. The danger of the rural movement coalescing with strikes in industry was ever present. The 'Nairobi General Strike' was an urban struggle that had yet to coalesce with a social movement in the rural areas mature enough to follow the lead of the organised working class. Now, a decade later and fully recovered from the repression of the Emergency period, such a combined movement underwent multiple eruptions. Thika's plantation strikes initiated an era of struggles that had hardly dissipated by the middle of the decade. These battles were provoked by the planters attempts to increase the extraction of surplus value from their workforce in an attempt to compensate themselves for the falling price of coffee on world markets. In June 1962, the general strike that everyone had feared erupted to the surface to seriously imperil preparations for independence. This all embracing conflict involved not just coffee workers, but those on tea plantations, mixed farms, the railways and in local government along with teachers and civil servants. The K.F.L. lost control and blamed the strike as 'politically motivated', and derided workers for

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<sup>109</sup> D.N.Hyde, *Upsurge in the Kericho Valley: Tea Plantation Strikes 1959-66*, unpublished S.O.A.S. monograph [1999].

taking action because they did not 'know the reason for strikes having been called.'<sup>110</sup> The element of spontaneity in this and successive strike waves was characterised by an anger and immediacy that by and large refused conciliation. Indeed, a distinctive feature of plantation strikes throughout this period was the absence of any advance warning or recourse to recognised conciliation machinery. By 1963 the plantation unions representing tea, coffee, sisal and general labourers had become a formidable force as they amalgamated to form the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union [K.P.A.W.U.]. However, this also concentrated power into the hands of a 'class collaborationist' trade union bureaucracy and enabled Mboya to fit a legal straitjacket that almost castrated the new union, though recurrent conflicts thereafter revealed a membership that was far from defeated.

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<sup>110</sup> E.A.S. 8 June 1962 : Industrial Relations.



## 2. *The World Coffee Crisis and its Impact on Kenya*

Following the collapse of prices in 1933, the recovery of plantation coffee production was lifted by wartime price supports and post-war price increases. The acreage under cultivation and the numbers of European farmers entering coffee production expanded with government assistance such as the extension of credit and provision of compulsory labour. Under the Lend-Lease Agreement during the war, Kenya's purchases of farm machinery increased tenfold<sup>1</sup> enabling the mechanisation of settler farming, including coffee production. The post-war boom stimulated an increase in investment giving a growth rate of 13% a year between 1947-54.<sup>2</sup> The demand for coffee was well ahead of supply and led to peak prices in 1955. By the mid fifties however, the wartime period of a sellers market was at an end. The ensuing period became one of deepening financial crisis for most coffee producing countries brought about by a decline in the price of their major export.

The East African territories had expanded their output to approximately 6% of the world's coffee production only to fall upon a shrinking market. Even so, the Latin American producers continued to increase their production threatening a glut in world markets. The prospect of an economic catastrophe that would wipe out smaller producers following the release of surplus stocks was ever present. Thereafter a crisis of overproduction increasingly consumed the industry and led to internecine struggles within the International Coffee Organisation [I.C.O.] for ever larger slices of a contracting market. Whilst relationships between producers appeared to be regulated by the quota system enshrined in the International Coffee Agreement [I.C.A.],<sup>3</sup> the dominant producers held the smaller ones to ransom with a threat to flood the world market with their surpluses, in order to enlarge their quotas. The price meltdown following such a move would have almost certainly plunged Kenya into a depression during its transition to independence. The haunting spectre of the thirties dominated the fears and apprehensions of all in Kenya's coffee industry.<sup>4</sup> The analysis which follows departs from the conditions and tendencies of the world economic crisis of the coffee commodity and its imperious domination of the national market in Kenya. Our appreciation aims to

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<sup>1</sup> R. Van Zwanenberg and A. King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda*, [New Jersey, 1975] pp.44-5.

<sup>2</sup> International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, cited in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley* [London, 1992], p.242.

<sup>3</sup> This was renewed annually to ration the exports of producing countries in accordance with a prospective estimate of world coffee demand, to minimise the impact of saturated markets and price wars.

<sup>4</sup> In 1933 world coffee prices had collapsed after Brazil had released its surpluses. Kenya's coffee producers then had to sell at £30 a ton and 25% of the then 40,000 acres under plantings had gone out of production. A repeat of these events threatened a catastrophe to Kenya's fragile economy.

go beyond an amalgam of the features of this crisis and to appreciate the mutual antagonism between Kenya and other coffee producers and the contradictions this produced.

*The Coffee Crisis and the Balance of Trade, 1956 - 60*<sup>5</sup>

During 1954-6, three successive annual coffee crops had averaged 20,000 tons. During this period, the coffee industry had been responsible for £28,328,300 out of total agricultural export earnings valued at £67,556,070. In 1956 a peak crop of 26,711 tons was raised and increased exports of coffee were the main reason for an overall rise of £2,623,413 in the value of Kenya's agricultural exports. The Department of Agriculture annual report recorded that coffee exports rose from £8,926,908 to £13,674,568 bringing the total value of agricultural exports to £26,178,121. By 1956 then, at the close of a peak period for the commodity, coffee accounted for more than half the value of Kenya's agricultural exports. Thereafter its contribution to the balance of trade began to slide. The economy overall suffered a 13% overall reduction in trade during the first nine months of 1957. Agricultural exports fell in value to £23,446,278 as compared to the previous year with the 'bulk of the fall' attributed to coffee whose value fell to £10,812,281. Even though the 1957 crop fetched on average £25 a ton more than in 1956, the latter was a peak crop at 4,427 tons in excess of the subsequent year. Overall, plummeting sales caused a 35.54% reduction in its value with the commodity falling to a third of the colony's export trade.<sup>6</sup>

Even though West Germany had bought £4,500,000<sup>7</sup> worth of higher grade coffees during the 1956-7 the season, Hamburg buyers gave notice that only provided its 'quality standards' were maintained, would Kenya's coffees 'be assured of a good market reception.'<sup>8</sup> During the following year, Kenya's reputation as a producer of the world's finest liquoring coffee<sup>9</sup> came further into question as, according to the Coffee Board of Kenya's [C.B.K.] Chief Liquorer, its quality was 'far below that on which its name had been built.' Only 8,800 tons of Kenya's 1957 coffee crop of 22,284 tons were sold at £453 a ton, with a total value of nearly £4 million. On a falling market, Germany was still its best customer paying premium prices at the auctions where class 1 coffee had realised £574 a ton, though overall the season's average had slumped to just £388 a ton, £84 down on the previous year's figure and representing a shortfall of more than 20%. Kenya's market in West

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 35, giving details of quantities and values of the coffee commodity relative to the values of total exported agricultural produce, 1939-65.

<sup>6</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/ Department of Agriculture Annual Reports. See Appendix 35.

<sup>7</sup> By 1962, West Germany was Kenya's largest market.

<sup>8</sup> E.A.S. 29 November 1957: 'Sharp drop in the quality of Kenya coffee'.

<sup>9</sup> Kenya's main competitor quality wise was Columbia, which produced on average between 7 to 8 million bags a year or about 400,000 to 470,000 tons, well over ten times Kenya's production.

Germany was dependent on a few large buyers and the failure of a single one of these to purchase 'would be disastrous'.<sup>10</sup>

During 1958-9, the C.B.K. paid out more than £10,000,000 to farmers for sales on a crop in excess of 30,000 tons, though this was sold at a lower average price than the previous year. In the year ending September 1960, Kenya exported £10,623,979 worth of coffee, making it by far the colony's biggest foreign exchange earner, although the commodity was still selling at a lower average price. By this time the crop was rapidly expanding as more than 110,000 African growers were producing alongside of 1,200 European farms and plantations. Nonetheless, whilst greater quantities of the crop were being sold, it was still far away from recovering its peak prices of 1955-6.

Whilst the 1956-7 'campaign period' had ended with world supply and demand at a rough equilibrium, there was a penalty of 9,000,000 bags of unsold coffee, two thirds of this belonging to Brazil. These unsold surpluses were carried over into the following year to be set against rising production and stringent international quotas, causing a persistent problem and a driving force for this crisis. As governments responded to these pressures through subsidies to underwrite the burden of those planters who had failed to sell their crops, the currencies of the main producers began to show the signs of strain. The proceedings of the annual Nairobi coffee conference held in July 1957 were dominated by the crisis in the industry. Delegates from the C.B.K. and the Coffee Marketing Board [C.M.B.] expressed anxieties over falling sales and plans to reestablish Kenya's pre-eminent position in the British market, now a mere 6%, were discussed.

The loss of British markets was compounded by the unease over threats to Kenyan producers emanating from protectionist measures of the newly formed European Economic Community. This took the form of a 16% levy on coffees coming from overseas territories unattached to the six states of the E.E.C. This was a major setback since a large portion of East African coffee, as well as other commodities, were sold in the Common Market Area. There were particular fears about the loss of markets for Kenya's higher grade coffees. German importers were the principal customers for these grades whilst Britain and the U.S.A. were the main buyers of the ordinary grades.

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<sup>10</sup> E.A.S. 17 November 1965: 'Kenya facing coffee crop surplus'.

With the prospect of East African coffee exports being locked out of Europe, feverish attempts were made to find alternative markets. The United States was cultivating allies in the region as well as coveting access to Britain's protected markets in the colonial domains.<sup>11</sup> A crisis of overproduction with a constant battle for quotas, gave huge political advantage to the United States that was by far the largest single market, consuming more than half the world's coffee exports. America's intake of East African coffee, though still very small in proportion to coffee imports from Latin America, had increased by 150% since 1953. The President of the National Coffee Association of America on a visit to Nairobi reassured planters of more sales provided that "the price remained right and the quality was maintained." With British and European markets dwindling, the American market offered a strong survival option for East African producers. The quota system was politically dominated by the South American producers with their close ties to the United States, which could use this set of relationships to make recalcitrant countries bend more readily to its sphere of influence. The essence of this web of relationships was the export of capital from the United States to secure captive markets and resources as well as political stability and enforced loyalty amongst its client coffee producers.

### *The Stresses of Global Competition*

The dilemmas facing the industry and the government were illustrated by Michael Blundell in his address to the annual conference of the Kenya National Farmers Union [K.N.F.U.] in Nairobi in May, 1958. He emphasised that the 'most damaging blow to the economy as a whole has been the steep fall in coffee prices'. The world market had been temporarily stabilised only by withholding the entry of large scale reserve stocks of Latin American coffee. This had been at the expense of building up even larger excesses in the forthcoming year, which Blundell estimated would exceed 27,000,000 bags as against a world annual consumption of 38,000,000 bags. This was later underlined by a report issued by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation which estimated world coffee production for 1958-9 at 3,300,000 metric tonnes, 9% higher than the previous year.<sup>12</sup> Blundell drew attention to the support the Government derived from the coffee industry and that 'it was reluctant to enter a quota system to reduce production.'<sup>13</sup> This stance was founded on the belief that rising coffee production amongst African farmers would place the industry in a better position to

<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ *'East Africa - a Market for U.S. Products in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda'*, a supplement issued by the U.S. Department of Commerce/ Bureau of International Commerce. By 1964, fifty American companies were operating in Kenya. The United States had also secured a large scale market in the country with imports worth more than \$300 million.

<sup>12</sup> E.A.S. 2 June 1959: 'Drop in coffee prices continues' and 'Demand not keeping pace with production rises'

<sup>13</sup> Kenya was not yet a full member of the I.C.O., a 'privilege' which would bring this compulsion along with it.

meet 'the challenge of falling prices...' <sup>14</sup>, since they were in a stronger position to reduce their production costs.

In full knowledge of the dimensions of overproduction and the glut on world markets, Blundell proposed that production in Kenya be increased. Enigmatic in itself, combined with a reduction in 'overheads' this made complete sense. The principal 'overhead' was of course the cost of labour power. The lower cost of labour per unit of production would mean a potential increase in the extraction of surplus value and a potentially higher rate of profit. There were two ways open to coffee planters to heed this advice. Either to increase the rate of exploitation by lengthening or intensifying the working day with no proportionate increase in wages, or by imposing straightforward pay cuts. Alternatively, an application of new technology to production would mean higher productivity from a reduced workforce. The problem of the latter option was tied to a considerable outlay of capital at a time when many planters were strapped. Both alternatives would involve a collision course with the plantation proletariat in the making. Blundell pointed to the inevitability of "severe competition" and warned that the region's coffee producers would "continue to attract good prices only if we maintain quality." <sup>15</sup> Here was the settlers foremost leader warning his audience of the necessities on the horizon. What Blundell dare not mention was that restrictive quotas threatened to strangle even the lower cost producers.

This highlighted the sharp contradiction between the I.C.O.'s tight quotas and the Governments policy to 'double Kenya's coffee production'. <sup>16</sup> Why was Blundell urging planters to step up production during a crisis of overproduction? The financial solvency of the state machine depended to no small extent on tax remittances from the coffee industry. Diminishing returns and a depressed industry would hit government revenues and threaten social and political instability. Thus the C.B.K. advanced its consumerist solution of 'demand management', a controlled release of some surplus stocks in order to lower prices and expand sales. While this would ease the pressure on some producers, those selling off below their costs of production would go to the wall.

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<sup>14</sup> E.A.S. 13 November 1958: 'Minister reviews colony's farming prospects - warning of severe coffee price drop'.

<sup>15</sup> E.A.S. 28 May 1958: 'Kenya farms faced with worst crisis since 1930s- cuts in costs essential'.

<sup>16</sup> E.A.S. 25 October 1958: "'Odd' policy on coffee - assistance likely to be needed in marketing'.

The C.M.B. came forward with its own schema that made a virtue of falling world prices, arguing that this would encourage consumption and discourage production. The board's<sup>17</sup> line was to wait upon the market for an expectant cycle of cheap coffee prices, which would 'come quickly enough'. With the arrival of this scenario, East Africa 'could get through'. If surplus stocks were released the prices of all coffees would tumble 'very steeply'. The C.M.B.'s strategy was to bring supply and demand into equilibrium by reducing supplies, by restricting production and new plantings, and through stimulating demand to soak up surpluses.<sup>18</sup> The end result would be the restoration of equilibrium within the industry.

During December 1958 the crisis deteriorated further as the prices of lower to medium grades of Kenyan coffee entered into the anticipated slide and ended down by £20 to £30 a ton, with losses estimated at 'about £1,000,000'. Prevarication had lent the initiative to the market, an unconscious interplay of chaotic social forces. This prompted a pervasive desperation all round to resolve the crisis of overproduction. Brooke Bond responded without warning and reduced their prices by as much as 80 cents a lb. in a bid to shrink their competitors, whilst the East African Coffee Roasting Association followed with its position that nothing less would do than to drop prices.<sup>19</sup>

With the approach of the 1959-60 season, the Latin American producers came forward with draft proposals that Britain's African colonies of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Sierra Leone should limit their exports to 1,949,000 bags.<sup>20</sup> The chairman of both the C.M.B. and the Kenya Planters' Co-operative Union, R.S.Wollen was 'categorical' in an announcement to the Nairobi Coffee Conference that Kenya "would not be a signatory to this scheme". He emphasised the scarcity value of Kenya's high quality coffees and argued that it was the cheaper coffees that were in 'oversupply'. Wollen led the conference into denial that the crisis even touched them, 'confident that however much coffee is released in the world we shall always be able to sell our total production and at some premium for quality'. Kenya's producers should not be swayed by the threat of catastrophe, since the quality of their coffees were above the rest. There was a significant lobby in favour of going it alone. Kenya's coffee production was increasing by 2,500 tons a year and plans were underway to develop the potential market amongst Africans in Kenya for cheap coffee. Market outlets in Rhodesia and South Africa were also being explored. In reality though these options were hardly enough to make a

<sup>17</sup> It was against the law for producers to market their own coffee. The C.M.B. had statutory powers which made it responsible for the disposal of all grades of Kenya coffee by public auction, with the exception of coffee that was sold locally.

<sup>18</sup> E.A.S. 21 November 1958: 'Cheaper prices good for coffee in the long run - report on world trade talks'.

<sup>19</sup> E.A.S. 2 December 1958: 'Concern at slide of coffee prices - effect on Kenya economy'.

<sup>20</sup> E.A.S. 7 July 1959: 'Alarm at coffee proposal' - threat to output from East Africa.'

difference since Kenya's coffees held on only by the slender thread held by German buyers. Even so, Wollen was 'frankly terrified' that if Brazil were to release her surpluses onto the world market 'the fall in the price of all coffees would be catastrophic.'<sup>21</sup>

As further talks got under way in Washington on the adoption of the 1959-60 global marketing agreement, new proposals were advanced for an increased export quota of 40,272,000 bags matched against an estimated annual world consumption of 38,000,000 bags.<sup>22</sup> Such an excess of supply over demand would almost certainly keep prices in the doldrums. The Latin American producers led by Brazil manoeuvred to lure the Africans into a world-wide quota pact that they would dominate. There were also signs of brinkmanship between the warring factions. Whilst both would sink amidst an economic collapse, this did not prevent either from taunting the other with the prospect of such a disaster in order to extract more of the quota for themselves. The C.M.B., with its head still in the sand, believed that African producers had significant leverage over their Latin American rivals and that Brazil would not seek 'to prompt such a disaster.' Nonetheless, there was more than a little suspicion amongst the East African producers that the provisions of the proposed pact did 'not augur entirely well' for them. There was deep resentment at a quota pact that would involve the region's producers retaining 24,000 tons of their produce 'just to protect the artificially high prices' sought by the Latin American producers.<sup>23</sup> Kenya's Agricultural Minister, Bruce Mackenzie cautioned against complacency and warned that the prospect of Brazil offloading its stockpiles, accumulating at a million tons a year, onto world markets was a very real one.<sup>24</sup>

Finally an agreement on export quotas was reached following a surprise abject capitulation by the East African producers in which they agreed to withhold 54,000 bags from the market, more than double the previous figure. What had changed to coax them into signing such a deal? A new dimension to the pact was introduced that excluded any new markets developed by the producing countries from the export quotas.<sup>25</sup> Would non-quota markets be enough to soak up the surpluses of rising production? This problem was highlighted by figures released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that forecasted record production levels of African coffee, which for 1959-60 was estimated at 10.6 million bags, of which 10.1 million would be exportable, 5% above the previous

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<sup>21</sup> E.A.S. 25 June 1959: 'Kenya opposes plan to limit coffee exports - assured market for quality goods'.

<sup>22</sup> E.A.S. 24 June 1959: 'Talks in U.S. on Coffee Agreement'.

<sup>23</sup> E.A.S. 26 August 1959: 'Coffee export control'.

<sup>24</sup> E.A.S. 2 September 1959: 'Stockpiling of coffee threat to world price'.

<sup>25</sup> E.A.S. 26 September 1959: 'Agreement signed on coffee quotas'.

year.<sup>26</sup> The situation worsened in the following year as the East African producers became full members of the I.C.A. and forfeited their right to restrict their exports voluntarily. They were now strictly bound by export quotas which were revised downward by 200,000 to 2,380,000 bags for 1960-1 under circumstances where prices had been falling 'throughout the season for all grades and classes', a trend compounded by the poor quality of the season's crop.<sup>27</sup>

Restraints and quotas aside, Blundell laid down the government's policy that Kenya could 'not contemplate' any direct control of production, whatever long term world agreement was concluded in future.' In promoting Arabica<sup>28</sup> as 'an excellent cash crop for the African smallholder'<sup>29</sup>, he indicated the government's concern to encourage African farmers who were in a stronger position to keep their production costs low. This would enable the C.M.B. to sell larger quantities of coffee on non-quota markets with less fear of the commodity being sold off at below its costs of production and distribution. On this basis, Blundell was willing to go along with quotas if the reduction 'was not to great', even while he believed the rate of current expansion in Kenya coffee growing had to be maintained so that producers were prepared for the 'upward swing in the coffee cycle'. Blundell was hedging the fortunes of Kenyan growers 'on a complete price collapse of Brazilian Robustas' in the hope that Kenya's Arabica would hold its own. He moved closer to the C.M.B. arguing that Kenyan coffee 'could probably continue to command premium prices' on the strength of its reputed excellence, thus cashing in on the misfortunes of its rivals. This notwithstanding, he expressed the reservation that, in a price war involving the lower grade coffees, 'there was a danger that the price of even the best qualities would decline precipitously.'<sup>30</sup> Blundell was acutely conscious of the tentative and fragile relationships between international producers and consumers, and the vulnerability of them all to the vagaries of the world market. Struggles between producers at a time of rising production, falling prices and shrinking markets were the background to the brinkmanship that courted the collapse of entire economies.

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<sup>26</sup> E.A.S. 30 September 1959: 'Record coffee crop in Africa likely - U.S. Report.'

<sup>27</sup> E.A.S. 10 December 1960: 'Coffee group to stabilise prices all over Africa'.

<sup>28</sup> According to the evidence given to the Verjee Tribunal, apart from 300 acres growing Robusta coffee, the remainder was all Arabica.

<sup>29</sup> E.A.S. 10 December 1960: 'Coffee group to stabilise prices all over Africa'.

<sup>30</sup> E.A.S. 7 May 1961: 'Minister on coffee treaty - Kenya would not accept output limit'.



During 1961, the fall in world prices had a dramatic impact on Kenya's economy. Alarm bells rang at the Nairobi coffee auctions where class 6 coffee sold at an average of 311/- per cwt as compared to 366/- in the previous season. Was this the beginning of a meltdown?<sup>31</sup> A report published by the Department of Trade and Supplies revealed that Kenya's domestic exports had fallen by 7.4% during 1960. This was almost entirely due to lower coffee prices, so that while the proportion coffee exports were 37.8% of Kenya's total, their relative value had fallen.<sup>32</sup> The future of international coffee agreements was now itself in the balance and was the subject of talks in London between representatives of the three East African territories and the British government. The problems of adhering to long term agreements and the prolongation of the existing agreement were discussed. Why and for what purpose was Britain intervening at this juncture? This was related to concern for the economic and political stability of its colony during the transition to independence, and to tame the settler planters whom it regarded as getting above themselves by holding an international agreement to ransom.<sup>33</sup>

The recurrent emphasis on quality and productivity surfaced again at the coffee conference in Nairobi held in July 1961 attended by 55 representatives of coffee organisations and societies throughout Kenya. Roger Swynnerton, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, echoed the almost constant refrain of other spokesman for the coffee industry with his sermon of 'sound development and quality maintenance' as crucial to the 'survival of the coffee industry at a critical time'. Swynnerton's formula relied on an 'increase in advisory and research services'<sup>34</sup> whilst at the same time keeping 'a close eye' on foreign competitors. He reminded delegates that while the price of coffee had fallen by £200 a ton during the previous four years, the industry had managed to sustain itself by exporting more than £10,000,000 worth of coffee, through increasing production by more than 9,000 tons and by 'preserving quality.'<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, without a larger quota to soak up the surpluses, such a strategy was storing up inescapable problems for the industry.

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<sup>31</sup> E.A.S. 10 May 1961: 'Coffee auction'.

<sup>32</sup> K.N.A./ *Kenya Trade and Supplies Bulletin*, June 1961.

<sup>33</sup> E.A.S. 21 June 1961: 'London coffee talks clarified issues - policy study made'.

<sup>34</sup> To ensure continued research to keep the industry safe from the onslaught of coffee berry disease, leaf rust and insect pests, a grant of £21,235 was announced in May, 1960 from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. Research into methods of increasing crop yields and soil conservation were also prioritised. The most important work occurred at the Coffee Research Station situated on Jacaranda Estate in Ruiru. Working closely with the Soil Conservation Service, the station's research centred on entomology, plant physiology and pathology and agricultural chemistry. There were field trials for appropriate fertilisers and methods of mulching, pruning, cultivation, spraying and irrigation. Suitable varieties were trialed in the station's coffee nurseries. These efforts were supported by a major reconstruction programme at the Kenya Planters' Co-operative Union mill in Nairobi with plans to process 200 tons daily.

<sup>35</sup> E.A.S. 29 July 1961: 'Quality the key to coffee Industry survival - need for more research and advice

The crisis entered a new phase in September 1961 marked by a sharp and prolonged depression in world prices. At the 'first of the season' coffee auctions in Nairobi, class 6 coffee fell dramatically to just 292/- a cwt with the prices of most grades 'generally down' on the previous season's close. The 'downward drift'<sup>36</sup> in prices was so serious that the I.C.A. itself appeared to be on the brink of break-up amidst its bitter internal squabbles, with some producers on the verge of breaking ranks. As the fiction of controlled markets crumbled, political upheavals in Brazil created unease throughout the I.C.O. that internal pressures to release its surpluses would gain the upper hand. This seems to have intimidated the East African producers into accepting a 3% cut in export quotas from 1,468,541 bags in 1960-1 to 1,424,489 in 1961-2. This curb on exports could only worsen the region's economic position in a situation where its coffee growers could least afford curtailments on production. The restrictions of the I.C.A. were hardly able to arrest the crisis as world prices fell still further. The *Financial Times* in London believed the "likelihood is that prices will continue to fall for sometime to come." The C.M.B. now resorted to sell even more coffee under the counter in non-quota markets with the apparent aim of pressurising the dominant producers within the I.C.O. to increase Kenya's quota.<sup>37</sup>

The prospective price collapse on the horizon generated much unease in Britain and Kenya. R.S.Wollen told Nairobi Rotarians 'that no country on the verge of independence would weather the economic trouble which would follow a drop in coffee prices'. At present rates Kenya was likely to double its annual production of 500,000 bags within five years. Wollen warned that if there was no international agreement, coffee producing countries would face a price war and 'should this happen' Kenya would be lucky to sell its crop at a quarter of the present price. Wollen stressed the efforts of the Kenyan government towards negotiating an agreement, but "it will involve sacrifices and may be unpopular". He drew further attention to Brazil's stockpile of 40,000,000 bags that was 'as much as Kenya produced in 80 years'<sup>38</sup>, a figure that reached 52,000,000 bags by the close of 1962.<sup>39</sup> Brazil was using this coffee mountain to browbeat and intimidate the smaller producers into line behind its policies and domination of the I.C.O. This was a knife at the throat of Kenya's coffee planters, impelling sharp changes in class relations within the country as it moved closer to independence.

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stressed'.

<sup>36</sup> E.A.S. 21 September 1961: 'Peril in falling coffee prices - treaty's aim being ignored -chairman'.

<sup>37</sup> E.A.S. 14 March 1962: 'More coffee price fall likely: talks in U.S. vital to East Africa'.

<sup>38</sup> E.A.S. 13 April 1962: 'Drop in prices would ruin Kenya warns chairman of coffee board'.

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./ AMC 7/20: Arbitrator [Jimmy Verjee] Report, 'In the matter of an Arbitration of a Trade Dispute between the S.C.P.W.U. and the K.C.G.A.', November 1962.

At the 1962 International Coffee Conference, a five year agreement was reached whereby Kenya was bound to retain 12% of its total crop. Unless the world price for Kenya's coffee showed a steep rise, or it was able to substantially increase the volume and price of its sales in non-quota markets, the Verjee Tribunal believed that industry would 'be placed in a dangerously precarious position'.<sup>40</sup> The international export quota for 1962-3 was fixed by the conference at 45,000,000 bags thereby adding another 8,000,000 bags to unsold stocks. Whilst 'stabilising' markets and holding off a price war, this was at the expense of aggravating the crisis of overproduction. Whereas under previous agreements the East African territories had a single quota between them, Kenya now had a quota of its own that was fixed at 30,000 tons a year. However its crop estimate during the 1962-3 season was 38,000 tons, 11,000 tons more than the previous season from which there was an unsold surplus of 3,000 tons. Short of burning them, these cumulative 'excesses' could only be set against Kenya's fixed quota. About 10,000 tons of these stocks were to be disposed of locally and onto non-quota markets, though at a 'substantial reduction'<sup>41</sup> on the price obtained from sales to quota markets. Overall a much tighter margin would result all round, with a lower average rate of profit when sales to quota and non-quota markets<sup>42</sup> were taken together. In the previous four seasons the average price on local markets had been approximately £52 a ton, one-sixth of the price obtained on quota markets, and the average price obtained on non-quota markets approximately £150 per ton, giving a combined average of £75 per ton.<sup>43</sup> Such a low price acted as a drag on the much higher average price attained on quota markets. The upshot of this was that the level of demand, even though manipulated and artificial, was driving prices below their cost of production. There were too many capitals competing for diminishing portions of surplus value. Its implications for the rate of profit were illustrated by the figures shown below, presented to the 1962 Verjee Tribunal by the general manager of Socfinaf, Kenya's largest coffee plantation company.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./AMC 7/20: Verjee Report.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> The non-quota areas were low consumption markets in the low per capita income countries of Eastern Europe and East Asia.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> The company owned 12 estates spread over 37,960 acres, including 5,402 acres planted coffee.

*Coffee sales to quota, non-quota markets and local sales showing tonnages and average price per ton as at 1962.*

<i>Quotas</i>	<i>Tonnage</i>	<i>Price £ per Ton</i>
Sales to Quota Markets	30,000	300
Local Sales	1,200	52.5
Sales to Non-Quota Markets	9,800	150
Total	41,000	
Average price per ton		257 <sup>45</sup>

To avoid suffocation under a mountain of cumulative surpluses, the Verjee Tribunal believed that 'no effort should be spared'<sup>46</sup> to promote sales in non-quota markets. Nonetheless, this could only be a short run solution since all world producers were competing in non-quota markets as well. The crisis torn tendencies of the industry ultimately necessitated the annihilation of vast quantities of coffee capital on the world market in order to create an equilibrium between buyers and sellers. As the unity of the phases of production and exchange was threatened with rupture, only the strongest competitors would survive.

During 1961, Kenyan premium grade coffees rose by £28 to an average price of £348 a ton. As a result Kenyan coffee lost only recently gained markets in Holland and Sweden. This rise set prices too high and Kenya lost its footholds in these countries. Further ground was also lost in Britain. The survival of the coffee industry now seemed to hang largely by the slender thread of one market in West Germany, Kenya's 'most important buyer.' Already menaced by E.E.C. regulations, its loss would spell ruin for thousands of planters, both European and African.<sup>47</sup> This came at a time when Kenya's coffee production was 'increasing far more rapidly than its export outlets' prompting 'drastic control' over new plantings.<sup>48</sup> These restrictions were occasioned by the I.C.O.'s export quota for Kenya pegged at 30,000 tons against a crop estimate of around 38,000 tons, with substantial future increases predicted by the C.B.K. The board pointed out that Kenya was on course

<sup>45</sup> E.A.S. 6 February 1963: 'Coffee Auctions.' Of course this was subject to fluctuation. 568 tons were sold at the Nairobi coffee auction on 5 February 1963 at an average price of £310.91 a ton. The cumulative sales for the season were 19,562 tons at an average of £318.47 per ton. A total 417 tons of non-quota coffee averaged at £194.08 per ton.

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A. /AMC 7/20: Verjee Report.

<sup>47</sup> E.A.S. 28 July 1962: 'New markets lost by increased prices for coffee.'

<sup>48</sup> E.A.S. 22 November 1962: '5,000 ton target for non-quota markets: Kenya plans to raise exports of coffee'.

to exceed its export quota to the traditional high priced markets by more than 20% and that efforts to unload this surplus onto non-quota markets would cost the planter 'quite a lot of money.'<sup>49</sup>

Renewed concerns over quality surfaced with signs that German roasters 'were turning away' from Kenya coffees, a trend that came to fruition in November 1962 when Schweggmann and Co., agents for East African coffees in Bremen, confirmed that 'most' German coffee roasters were 'not using' Kenya coffee in their blends anymore because of the drop in quality. They complained that 'the well known attributes of fine liquoring Kenya coffees - flavour and acidity are rarely seen today.'<sup>50</sup> By this time Kenya was exporting half its crop to Germany, though 'only a few buyers are involved and should they change their mind the export situation could change in a few days.' There were several reasons for the drop in quality. Coffee growers had suffered bad weather for the three previous seasons and there was a marked tendency amongst growers to allow their trees to overbear.<sup>51</sup> Kenya's most cherished market was slipping away from it, as German buyers were unwilling to continue paying high prices and were looking at other suppliers.

For the 1965-6 season<sup>52</sup>, Kenya was able to achieve an increase in its quota to 750,000 bags that realised a substantial rise in value to more than £19,000,000 as compared with £14,700,000 in the previous year. Despite these gains, production expanded considerably in excess of Kenya's prescribed quota to more than a million bags.<sup>53</sup> Of the total crop of 47,000 tons for the year ending September 1966, 42,700 tons were sold under the I.C.A. quota and the rest to non-quota markets. Nonetheless, competition for non-quota markets was intensifying and Kenya was unable to rely on them to absorb its surpluses. The trend towards overproduction looked set to continue as African growers brought new land into coffee production. Anticipating a rise in production to 70,000 tons, the C.M.B. warned that, even with an increased I.C.A. quota, by 1968-9 'a substantial quantity would be unsaleable overseas.'<sup>54</sup>

Overall, the harsh curbing of the world market dictated the necessities to be adjusted to. The centre of gravity had shifted decidedly away from Kenya onto the world market. This crisis heralded the deepening of ties between Kenya and the world economy at the same time as it deepened the

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<sup>49</sup> E.A.S. 1 December 1962: 'Kenya coffee still the worlds best.'

<sup>50</sup> E.A.S. 1 August 1963: 'Coffee delays worry trade.'

<sup>51</sup> E.A.S. 5 November 1962: 'Kenya coffee losing flavour'.

<sup>52</sup> The quota year from October 1965 to September 1966.

<sup>53</sup> E.A.S. 6 October 1966: 'Sharp rise in Kenya exports'.

<sup>54</sup> E.A.S. 17 November 1965: 'Kenya coffee crop facing surplus'.

antagonism between them. Above all else, it was these objective linkages that stirred such deep contradictions at home.

### *Planters Protest Government Deductions*

We can now begin to understand the governments pressing concern and intimate involvement with the problems of coffee production, since the fortunes of Kenya's most important industry generated substantial material means for nourishing the state apparatus and to pay its legions of 'non-productive' workers. The government's general economic malaise disabled any commitment to underwrite the costs of production through subsidies to the industry. Indeed, it was looking at ways to raise extra revenue to ease its financial burden that involved further impositions on the industry. As early as 1957 the Board of Agriculture had warned settler farmers that they could not be shielded 'against the effects occasioned by the present shortage both of revenue to finance current needs and of loan funds for development.'<sup>55</sup> To make matters worse, the government had cut back its financial assistance just at a time when farmers needed it most.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst the government endeavoured to give some show of support for the industry,<sup>57</sup> it insisted that this service was to be paid for from the profits of the industry. Extra cess payments were imposed to raise revenue, set at 5% of the value of clean coffee to provide extension services, and relieve the government's own strapped finances. A 12.5 % export tax was also subtracted from the planters receipts, a measure that provoked a large section of them to close ranks and found the Kenya Coffee Growers Association [K.C.G.A.]<sup>58</sup> with the result that the tax was removed in 1957. Increased taxes came at a time of falling world prices and rising costs of production when returns to the planters were variable and unpredictable. Deductions from coffee revenues to pay for the security forces were another bone of contention. It was widely believed that for every eight bags of coffee picked, the government took one to help pay for the Emergency. In another blow to coffee growers,

<sup>55</sup> K.N.A. / Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1952-68.

<sup>56</sup> E.A.S. 4 May 1959: 'Finance warning given to farmers in Kenya'. By the beginning of April 1958, government loans to African farmers in Kiambu were on average 100% behind in interest payments, while those in Fort Hall were 90.32% arrears. Settler farmers had never fully recovered from the debacle of the 1930s which hit Kenya with a collapse of prices in 1933, leaving a majority of them in debt.

<sup>57</sup> Principally by the provision of extension staff such as instructors to supervise factory work, teach growers and help for newly emerging co-ops.

<sup>58</sup> While the planters were usually at each others throats in a competitive sense, the role of the K.C.G.A. was to preserve their essential class solidarity in face of both the working class on the plantations and the state when it strayed from acting in their interests. The advent of the K.C.G.A. was essentially a move to centralise industrial relations as far as possible in the industry, to organise the interests of the planters in face of heated competition from abroad, to regulate conflicts of interest between themselves and to uphold their position in trade disputes. See appendix 32: K.C.G.A. member estates giving details of numbers, locations and acreages of estates as at December 31st, 1960.

legislation to end the system by which producers had been permitted to average their profit over a number of years for income tax assessment was passed by the Central Legislative Assembly. The Commissioner for Income Tax 'pointed out that for 15 or 16 years coffee farmers had benefited from a relief arrangement which had not applied to other tax payers whose incomes had fluctuated.'<sup>59</sup> By this the government was relinquishing its protection of the industry in force since 1943, exposing it entirely to the vagaries of the world market.

Forty Kiambu coffee growers assembled to express strong opposition to Finance Minister Vasey's measure and passed a resolution demanding that the C.B.K. 'seek an interview with Mr Vasey to tell him of their concern.' They pleaded that the "iniquitous proposal", would make it difficult for them to 'make ends meet.' They drew up their own proposal for a tax rate which 'should not exceed' 12/- in the pound, with exemptions for undistributed and development expenditure. It also emerged that those planters who had bought coffee farms in recent years had raised loans on an expected rate of return that had all but collapsed. If the tax proposals were implemented 'it would be impossible for planters to meet their obligations to those who had sold the farms'<sup>60</sup>, and they would have to close their mortgages. A resolution was agreed and forwarded to the Nairobi Coffee Conference in July 1958, which called for an independent inquiry into the budget proposals 'with a view to ending the need for such high taxation.'<sup>61</sup> Here was the authentic voice of the most powerful section of settler planters from the cradle of Kenyan coffee production itself. To placate the outcry the C.B.K. acknowledged that 'planters were perturbed at the rate of the tax...'<sup>62</sup> and set up a committee to look into the controversial deduction. They were speaking for settler farmers and planters everywhere. Here was also the first of many conflicts with the state machine that faced its own economic malaise and was prepared to squeeze the planters and others to pay for it. These problems surfaced again over a further budget proposal for an undistributed income tax at the rate of 15/- in the pound. Even the C.B.K. protested that the Income Tax [Management] Bill would prevent smaller planters from accumulating the financial reserves necessary to shield themselves against the almost certain prospect of 'a serious drop in prices during the next few years.'<sup>63</sup> The significance of the bill was that the government was no longer able or willing to give even the semblance of favour and protection to European growers.

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<sup>59</sup> E.A.S. 28 March 1958: 'Coffee profit tax system ends'.

<sup>60</sup> E.A.S. 9 June 1958: 'Coffee Board committee to study new tax'.

<sup>61</sup> E.A.S. 24 June 1958: 'Kiambu planters tax resolution - discussion at conference'.

<sup>62</sup> E.A.S. 9 June 1958: 'Coffee Board committee to study new tax'.

<sup>63</sup> E.A.S. 31 October 1958: 'Coffee industry protests - proposed tax rate penal to smaller companies'.

After independence and well into the sixties, coffee revenues further declined and a whole range of financial impositions<sup>64</sup> continued to weigh heavily on Kenya's coffee growers. Resolutions before the Annual Coffee Conference in January 1965 in Nairobi from Kiambu, Thika, Kabete and Ruiru deplored the imposition of 'cess' payments. The C.M.B. had been instructed by the government to levy the 3% tax for the assistance of county council finances. Thika's growers protested at an 'intolerable burden on an industry already penalised by selective taxation which will act as a deterrent to the efficient high acre yield farmers', whilst planters in Kabete were indignant that 'cess is discriminatory, unjust and economically unsound.'<sup>65</sup> The Kiambu delegates requested the C.B.K. to change the cess to the normal rating method based on land values and improvements. The conference released a statement warning that deductions made from the industry's account would make its situation 'precarious if the world price of our coffee drops'. Opposition to cess payments was also forthcoming from delegates representing 100,000 mostly small scale African coffee farmers, attending the sixth conference of the Kenya Planters Co-operative Union and other coffee co-operative societies in Nairobi during November. The conference decided to appoint a committee to approach various ministries over the issue and 'to protest at the cess on an already overburdened industry....', while other agricultural produce was untaxed. African farmers were worried that cess would imperil their slender profit margins and 'cause a reduction in quantity and quality'.<sup>66</sup> The industry was at its limits, overburdened with deductions totalling £28 a ton, including export tax, I.C.O. contributions and a C.B.K. Levy.

Quite apart from these exactions, C.B.D. continued to take a heavy toll during 1964-5 when the season's crop totalled just 38,000 tons against an estimate of 45,000 tons. The C.B.K. again pointed to the impact of disease, heavy taxation, the incidence of drought and a low rate of profit as the 'serious problems' facing growers 'leading some to uproot their crops'. Large numbers of African producers on the upper slopes of the Aberdares and Mount Kenya where C.B.D. was more prevalent had uprooted their trees and opted for tea growing instead because of their disillusionment with the

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<sup>64</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20: Verjee Report. By the time of the Verjee tribunal in December 1962, costs of production were at record levels. 'Once coffee is off the trees, the producer is required to transport his crop to Nairobi. He is required to pay the Coffee Board an ordinary cess of 1% and a storage of a ¼% per ton., which is £3.21 per ton. He also has to pay the C.M.B. charges in respect of warehousing, insurance, brokerage, packing and overheads, which make a total of £5.90 a ton. Finally, he has to pay the Agent's commission and the charges of the I.C.O., which amount to £1.07 per ton. From the average price per ton payable to a grower in respect of coffee sold through the C.M.B., there is a total deduction of approximately £10 in respect of the aforesaid outgoings and charges.'

<sup>65</sup> E.A.S. 12 January 1965: 'Opposition to cess on coffee'.

<sup>66</sup> E.A.S. 12 November 1965: 'Coffee growers form committee to fight cess'.



co-operative societies over continued low payments.<sup>67</sup> During 1967, world overproduction and I.C.A. quotas impacted harder than ever on Kenyan growers. This was reflected in the 'marked reduction in the general quality' of Kenya coffee brought on by a 'lack of funds' to carry out necessary production tasks such as fertilising and spraying. This had left crops vulnerable to recurrent drought and the ravages of C.B.D. resulting in losses in the region of 35-40%. These problems were compounded by a 'very heavy' export tax of £20 per ton and the generalised refusal by the banks 'to permit planters to run up debts' to keep their heads above water.

### *The Course Towards African Coffee Production* <sup>68</sup>

The other major pressure pushing European growers to raise the rate of exploitation on their plantations was increased competition from African coffee producers. Under the Swynnerton Plan<sup>69</sup>, African smallholders were encouraged to enter coffee production on a large scale at a time of falling world prices. The thinking behind this was that Africans would commit more labour time to coffee growing and that their costs of production would be much lower than those on European owned plantations and more suitably orientated to declining price levels. In short they would be able to part with their crop at substantially lower prices than European planters could afford to. Hence the formula of a rising quantity of high quality coffee sold at low prices. Africans would produce coffee well below the costs of production incurred on European plantations and by overseas competitors. This would bring forward the day when Kenyan coffees would price the Latin American producers out some of their most protected markets. By 1958, the Ministry of Agriculture affirmed that coffee planting in the African areas was expanding 'at tremendous speed.'<sup>70</sup>

The African coffee crop of 1957 was described as of 'excellent' quality, whereas that picked in the European areas was described as 'bad' and 'deplorable'. Figures issued by the C.B.K. revealed that six out of ten African areas had produced more than half their crop in the first three classes of coffee

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<sup>67</sup> C.B.K. / *Kenya Coffee*, C.B.K. Monthly Bulletin, January 1966.

<sup>68</sup> Appendix 35 gives details of quantities and values of African coffee production. See also appendix 36 for acreages, yields and remunerations of African and European coffee production.

<sup>69</sup> E.A.S. 27 July 1957: 'Board may include African members - proposal for three members approved'. In his 'New Year Message' [1958] to the colonies, Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd referred to an 'agricultural revolution' in Kenya. This was a reference to the Swynnerton Plan which was funded by a special grant of £5,000,000 from the Colonial Development and Welfare funds towards the cost of developing African agriculture. He predicted that "if the present rate of work can be maintained over the next five years, the whole picture of African agriculture in Kenya will have permanently changed".

<sup>70</sup> C.B.K. / *Kenya Coffee* C.B.K. Monthly Bulletin, January 1958. The rapid expansion of coffee planting area was restricted in 1963 and temporarily halted in 1964 under the terms of the I.C.A. because of world over production, and because of the ravages of C.B.D.

during the season. By contrast, only one in sixteen European areas had managed to grade more than 50% of their production in these classes. From then on African growers continued to register higher quality coffee than their European counterparts 'well into the sixties'.<sup>71</sup> One reason for this performance was that younger trees were coming into maturity in the reserves, whereas Europeans had allowed their trees to overbear when prices were low.<sup>72</sup> Another was that workers seemed to be picking coffee better in the reserves than in the settled areas and there were demands from the settlers that attempts 'be made to equate the standard'. The Labour Department's response was to establish some formal supervisory training for nyaparas to help them 'to raise the standard'.<sup>73</sup>

Underlying the reorganisation of agriculture was not merely the concentration of production into singular and larger land units but a lengthening of the working day combined with an intensification in the expenditure of labour power for its duration. The discipline and compulsion for such energy fell to the smallholder and his family. Household labour<sup>74</sup> could be mobilised year round supplemented with hired labour during the picking seasons. These farmers were prepared to put in long hours for a much smaller returns than those expected by settler farmers, thus lowering the costs of production and ensuring sufficient capital accumulation to sustain and ensure the reproduction of small scale producers, for at least the short term. Also, with such a high premium on quality, it was thought that small planters would take extra care and expend more time and energy on crops that were owned and managed by themselves. By contrast, crops harvested by labourers working under the pressure of unrealistic picking rates to make up a debe<sup>75</sup> often contained unripe berries which impaired quality. This is the real reason why Africans were permitted to produce coffee on a mass scale. The African small holder able to give 'detailed horticultural attention to his crop'<sup>76</sup> was now eclipsing the settler planters. Their lower production costs enabled their coffee to sell at a lower average price, making it especially suitable for non-quota markets. The result of this growth of

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<sup>71</sup> Judith Heyer, 'Agricultural Development Policy in Kenya from the Colonial Period to 1975', in *Rural Development in Tropical Africa*.

<sup>72</sup> This created pruning problems, since overbearing created poor quality coffee, prevented trees from cropping for 1-2 years and shortened their life.

<sup>73</sup> C.B.K. / *Kenya Coffee Monthly Bulletin*, January 1958.

<sup>74</sup> "There was always something to do all year round. The whole family was always involved". Interview with Terry Wairimu, daughter of a Nyeri coffee farmer who enlarged his land under the Swynnerton Plan.

<sup>75</sup> '...those four-gallon paraffin tins that had become a universal water-vessel, measure and roofing material.' Elspeth Huxley, *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* [London, 1960], p.9. These were capable of carrying anything between 6,000 to 18,000 cherries, depending on the size of the cherry. The average was about 8,000 per debbe or 4,000,000 cherries per ton. The differences were accounted for by the weight and size of the cherry. Sometimes, with excess of rain, the cherry or the pulp was bigger or thicker. With less rain, the bean or kernel was smaller. Overall, there was rough average of 550 debbes to the ton. See K.N.A./ AMC 7/20: *Verjee Report*, p.12.

<sup>76</sup> C.B.K./ *Kenya Coffee Monthly Bulletin*, June 1965.

African coffee production was to marginalise those settler planters whose costs of production were too high to keep them in the running.

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

Our theoretical appraisal of the world coffee crisis and its reflection in Kenya's plantation economy here departs not from the economics of the national terrain, but from the world economy to which it was subordinate and from which it derived its essential characteristic features. The problems and contradictions of the Kenyan economy during this period must be evaluated in full light of this relationship.

The crisis within Kenya's plantation economy reflected a profound upheaval within the world coffee market. Overproduction and disequilibrium between production and consumption were the basic phenomenon of this crisis, creating a pervasive situation of flagging accumulation. Too much coffee capital was seeking a share of a diminishing pool of surplus value. When their profits fell below the average there was a danger that many European planters would go to the wall as their costs of production exceeded their profit margins. The average rate of profit was pulled below what European growers could bear by overseas competition and the expansion of African coffee production which devalued settler capital. The embryonic landed African bourgeoisie was the only layer able to make real gains under these conditions. This crisis was accompanied by the increasing pace of class formation and social differentiation amongst African farmers, with the result that the smaller capitals were swallowed up by the stronger accumulators.

This crisis took the form of the highly abstract appearances of the commodity as they showed themselves at Nairobi's weekly coffee auction. Only the fiction of real value could manifest itself at this exchange, as fluctuating prices which nobody had any control over. These were but monetary expressions of something other<sup>77</sup>, the surplus value created by unpaid labour. It was the latter's expenditure, measured by socially necessary labour time, which when congealed constituted the value of coffee. The absolute necessity of planter capital to extract a maximum of surplus value from the labour force through an intensification of the labour process made itself continually evident. This lay beyond the appearance of the immediately given 'facts' from which it had to be deciphered or abstracted. Price movements mystified and obscured the real relations between the producers as they received expression in the value form.

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<sup>77</sup> 'Value ... does not stalk around with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic'. K.Marx, *Capital* Volume I [Moscow, 1959], p.79.

The planters pockets were touched by a falling rate of profit, averaged on a global arena, through the conflicting totality of coffee 'capital as a whole'.<sup>78</sup> Here, the contradictory movement of a mass of competing individual coffee capitals gave rise to the end result of an averaged rate of profit. Like socially necessary labour time this was a social hieroglyphic, a post-factum average which manifested itself only socially across 'capital as a whole'. As all sections of coffee capital struggled to secure a maximum rate of profit, the variant rates of profit were equalised to an average through competition, even while prices deviated from the value of commodities themselves. This emerged as the outcome of competition not only between the various national producers, but also from amongst rival growers within each country. In short, the average rate of profit was approximately equalised throughout coffee capital. Such tendencies were barely visible on the surface and, like the law of gravity, operated largely unseen.<sup>79</sup>

Under conditions of a saturated market, intensifying and increasing production lowered the rate of capital accumulation in relation to the volume of commodities. Along this road the rate of profit per unit of profit fell below the costs of production. The industry's chances of survival under such adverse circumstances was twofold. This necessitated efforts by the estate owners to rationalise the expenditure of labour power by restructuring labour time through prolonging, intensifying and extending the number of compulsory ticket days per month. The relationship between socially necessary labour time and the extraction of surplus value were reflected in the average rate of profit. This could only assert itself as labour time was measured socially through competition, after commodities had been sold and surplus value realised. Reducing the costs of variable capital [labour power] by increasing the element of unpaid labour time within the working day invariably led to redundancies. This could be achieved by both increasing the length of the working day<sup>80</sup> evidenced on many plantations and increasing the rate of effort for its duration. There were widespread occurrences of this as planters imposed increased picking tasks.

<sup>78</sup> See *Capital* Volume 3, where Marx deals with the 'movements of capital as a whole', by contrast with Volume One where he was concerned with the immediate process of capitalist production, where to a large extent the individual capitalist and his workers were the starting point.

<sup>79</sup> Marx's formula for the rate of profit thus as  $r = s / [c+v]$ , where  $c$  is constant capital [means of production],  $v$  is variable capital [labour power] and  $s$  is surplus value. Marx K., *Capital* Volume 1 [Moscow, 1959], p. 207.

<sup>80</sup> Until the late fifties this was between 4-5 hours on many estates. Thereafter the employers sought a uniform 8 hour day, a drive which instigated widespread opposition amongst the workforce.



Nonetheless, this strategy could not succeed on its own unless rival sections of coffee capital took each other on to appropriate the available surplus value for themselves. This meant undercutting and eliminating their competitors both at home and abroad. This forced the pace of technical change, compelling employers to transform their production processes and reorganise the workplace to ensure their very survival. Those employers who had invested in new technology and trimmed down their work forces apparently stood to suffer diminished profit margins since they had displaced more of the value creating commodity than their rivals. Ultimately though, the appropriation of surplus value was decided in the market place through wars of competition. In fact it was those employers who had renewed their working capital that stood to gain the most, even though they had displaced the most labour power. Otherwise those sectors of the economy with the higher organic composition of capital  $[c/v]$  would yield the lowest rate of profit. Even though their ratios of organic to variable capital were higher, those employers that had updated their means of production were in a stronger position to attract trade away from their rivals whose ratios were lower. Furthermore, the increasing ratio of constant to variable capital made the pool of available surplus value smaller, thus deepening the conflict between various sections of capital to stake their claims on it.

The ever present crisis tendencies within the market came to a head because the chains of commodity circulation had broken down. Vast surpluses of coffee were withheld from the sphere of circulation by strict quotas and were thus unable to undergo the metamorphosis into money and capital.<sup>81</sup> The crisis potential of this situation lay in the increasing separation between purchase and sale, between the production and circulation. This created a dysfunctional circuit of accumulation endangering the reproduction of coffee capital.

Having come this far, we are able to understand Blundell's paradoxical urge to Kenya's coffee growers to step up production during a contraction period. The planters were compelled to throw money into circulation to carry on coffee production. Their production costs involved an outlay including labour power, pesticides, fertilisers, taxes to the state for farming and other services, investment in mechanised and fixed capital as well as production costs related to coffee processing. This circuit could not be completed unless a larger sum of money was realised than that which initiated the accumulation cycle.<sup>82</sup> The self expansion of capital through the production and

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<sup>81</sup> K. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part II [London, 1969], p.509. Here Marx discusses the circuit of capital accumulation in some depth.

<sup>82</sup> Hence Marx's theorem that 'M' is used to buy commodities 'C' which is then sold for  $M/1$ , a large sum than M in itself, hence the formula  $M-C-M/1$ . K. Marx, *Capital* Volume I, Chapter IV 'The General Formula for Capital', pp.145-53, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1959. The passage from M to  $M/1$  required the

valorisation of surplus value was already at its limits for Kenya's European planters beyond which the circuit of accumulation was in danger of rupturing entirely. The price of coffees was so close to the costs of production that the very future of the industry was at risk. Where were the resources for continued accumulation to be derived from? How could the industry restore the conditions for profitability? These questions were principally related to the exploitation of labour power, the only commodity capable of producing more value than the costs of its own reproduction. Hence we can begin to appreciate why the planters were impelled to go to war with their own work forces.

The compelling motive for all was the self expansion of capital, but under conditions where markets were shrinking. No one could standstill. This was evidenced by an increasingly tense struggle between coffee producers to realise surplus value at each others expense. Beneath the veil of equality between the producing nations lay fierce competitive rivalries. The reality was of a few oligopolistic producers taking the lions share for themselves. This was ensured by price rigging and controlled markets, all with the I.C.O. seal of approval. Rival producing nations moved to reduce or eliminate entirely the competition of others. These relationships were reproduced between the producers within Kenya itself as price rigging and grading scams were evidenced throughout all pores of the system. European planters endeavoured to manipulate the structures and mechanisms of the C.M.B. and the C.B.K to keep their rivals amongst African farmers well to the rear. The unspoken aim was to manoeuvre European coffee into the higher quality grade bands that could be sold within designated quota markets, with the lower grades reserved for African farmers which could be dumped for a song on non-quota markets. After independence, these relationships far from withering away became more oppressive and widespread as well-to-do African farmers trampled all over their poorer brethren.

Above all else, the law of value affirmed itself with a vengeance. It was the spontaneous regulator of the market, asserting itself blindly amidst the vicissitudes of capitalist competition. This immanent law exerted itself only through a myriad of spontaneous accidents. Equilibrium was the exception rather than the rule, underproduction giving way to over production as the supply of commodities outstripped their demand and vice versa. Disproportions between supply and demand revealed themselves only post-factum, beyond the conscious control of the agents of production. The forces

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extraction of surplus value from living labour, there was no other source from which it could come. 'All capitalist production rests upon the purchase of labour power in order to appropriate part of what it produces without payment, this part [surplus value] is sold in the product ... this is the basis of existence of capital, its very essence' K.Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part I [London, 1969], p.284.

and relations of production confronted their erstwhile unconscious agents as blind and uncontrollable forces external to themselves. It was prices on the market after production that determined the economic necessity to be adjusted to. Whereas the law of value forcibly established the organic interconnectedness of the economic organism, this was reflected through private property relationships in the organisation of production which created the subsoil for separatism. Nonetheless, its objective contradictory logic summoned plantation struggles and imposed its ruthless necessities on all the participants.

### 3. *Production Relations at the Turning Point*

By the early fifties the compelling drive for higher and more qualitative productivity spelt the break up of the old relationships between employers and their work forces. The comparative coefficients between rival sections of capital at home and abroad asserted themselves in the market as the values of qualitatively different coffees and forms of labour power were equated through competition and exchange. This meant that labour and its output became more measured and less uneven. This was effected through the labour market which dispossessed concrete labour of its specific characteristics and established labour in general, that is abstract labour. Thus ethnic differences between workers, far from being accentuated as has been assumed, were reduced as class formation took its course. This tendency was given further impetus with mechanisation and the reduction of skills. There was also an imperative to break increasing numbers of workers from their petty means of production in the reserves and force them to become entirely wage dependent. The long period of coexistence with simple commodity production in the reserves now seemed at an end. With their diminishing dependence on the rural enclave, plantation workers reached out to trade unionism. This promised them a form of organisational independence to replace their eroded autonomy in the reserves. There was however a difference within this identity: whilst their erstwhile access to land in the reserves had long upheld their semi-proletarian status, it was workers' struggles to assert their independence as landless proletarians that explains their recourse to trade unionism. Whereas in England the agrarian revolution and its creation of an agricultural proletariat were separated by more than half a century from the emergence of trade unionism amongst Dorset farm labourers<sup>1</sup>, in Kenya this leap to organisation was almost immediate and integral to proletarianisation.

#### *The Fraught Course of Stabilisation*

The seeds of the dysfunctional labour market which marked the years of the Emergency had been germinating since the 1930s. There was an overabundance of people who worked irregularly and indifferently together with a shortage of skilled and steady workers. Complaints about the 'bad quality of this labour' and its lack of stability overflowed. Apart from their seasonal picking labour, plantation employers sought a smaller but more regular workforce. This raised the need to bring

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<sup>1</sup> See *Capital* Volume I, Part VIII: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation and The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land, which gives an explanation of these processes in England; see also E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Chapter 7: The Field Labourers, pp.233-58.



forward an attached cadre of workers mostly resident on the estates with their families. The costs of doing this under conditions of flagging accumulation became an anathema to many employers.

While slowly developing a class identity, which qualitatively emerged with the Union, plantation workers appeared an amorphous, unidentifiable mass. The reserves where seasonal labour resided were in fact vast reservoirs of labour power, containing a huge reserve army of cheap and dispensable labour at the beck and call of the employers. The coffee planters relied on workers coming out of these enclaves to labour on the estates 'as they always had done.'<sup>2</sup> These relationships reduced bargaining power and kept wage costs low. This system of production relations was grounded on the opposites of a 'dual economy'<sup>3</sup>, a relative equilibrium between capitalist plantation production and the withering pre-capitalist economies of rural Kenya which reproduced and supported the labour force for European employers. In the latter, the worker employed his own means of production, whereas in the former the means of production not only employed him but consumed him as the ferment necessary to their own life process.<sup>4</sup> This coexistence rested on a production subsidy, whereby rural household economies were left alone to generate a level of output high enough to sustain the reproduction of labour power within the extended family, but low enough to make the potential gains of labour migration increasingly essential.<sup>5</sup> These opposites had been held fast over a long period, with interaction more by chance than necessity, but from their reciprocal impacts matured powerful contradictions.

Just after the war, the principal supporting role of the reserves for capitalist accumulation began to turn into its opposite assuming two principal trajectories. In Central province overpopulation and the upheavals of the Emergency combined to push large numbers of workers into wage dependence. In other less pressured areas the converse tended to occur where, as Colonial Office's Labour Advisor Orde Brown observed, the 'target worker...leaves his village with the definite intention of coming back with a specific sum.'<sup>6</sup> In these districts as workers became more involved in capitalist agriculture and industry 'they used their wages to sustain their own, very different, forms of agrarian

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<sup>2</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/11:Enclosure 2.

<sup>3</sup> U.N.L./ T.U.C.: East Africa Royal Commission Report 1953-5, pp. 43 and 46, and 146-8.

<sup>4</sup> See K. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, Chapter 11: Rate and Mass of Surplus Value.

<sup>5</sup> For parallel changes in South Africa see H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society* Number 1[1972], pp.425-56; C. Meillassoux, From Reproduction to Production, *Economy and Society* Number 1[1972], pp. 93-105.

<sup>6</sup> Major St. J. Orde Browne, *Labour Conditions in East Africa*, Colonial Office No. 193 [London, 1946],p.5.

production.<sup>7</sup> In Central province these links became increasingly tenuous making African workers more dependent on the labour market, though at a time when it was more controlled than ever before.

By 1951 the continued expansion of industry and of large scale agricultural concerns were making unprecedented demands upon the labour market. Even with nearly fifty per cent of all adult male Africans labouring away from their native land units<sup>8</sup>, a shortage of unskilled workers was in evidence. This was closely related to the marked tendency by workers to seek work in the towns or on estates for periods not exceeding three to six months at a time. Wage levels were insufficient to entice these workers to stay over for longer periods or to support their families with them. Furthermore, their smallholdings still represented both protection against the threat of unemployment and the promise of social security in old age. The primary roots of these workers remained in the reserves, and the necessity of attending to these interests for one or more periods of the year, precluded 'under present circumstances'<sup>9</sup> an increase in the permanent labour force. Just prior to the Emergency there were complaints that 'the unskilled labourer'<sup>10</sup> was becoming 'more than usually'<sup>11</sup> unreliable in a trend for these workers to leave their employment suddenly and without warning. The bargaining position of such workers seems to have been strengthened in a seller's market where 'the unskilled African'<sup>12</sup> had less fear of the sack, 'as he knows that he can either obtain other employment easily or subsist in the Reserve.'<sup>13</sup> These problems erected insurmountable obstacles for maintaining bodies of workers with sufficient experience and expertise for even unskilled manual labour.

The urgent needs of agriculture and industry could hardly be met by drawing on the native land units for a transient labour force with no continuous experience and little inclination for regular employment. Any development of industry and increasingly plantations, reliant for so long on migrant labour, now presupposed a stabilised labour force consisting of 'men and women who are not recurrently going back to their reserves for long spells' and 'who regard industrial employment

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<sup>7</sup> F.Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*, p.117.

<sup>8</sup> One-third of the African labour force, some 150,000 workers, were apparently living permanently outside their reserves.

<sup>9</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/77: L.D.A.R. 1952, p.22.

<sup>10</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/75: L.D.A.R. 1951, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

as their sole means of livelihood; and who are prepared to buy or build their own houses in the towns and raise families there or live on or near the estates where they work.'<sup>14</sup> The reproduction of the next generation of wage labourers was also envisaged by the Labour Department as children were 'absorbed into industry as soon as they leave school', providing 'more stable material'<sup>15</sup> for training in the skilled trades and crafts. Many employers craved for such a stable labour force detached from the 'native land unit.'<sup>16</sup>

The Labour Department anticipated a considerable expansion in social services to underwrite the desired stability. Clinics, hospitals, schools, community centres and leisure facilities together with pension and sickness schemes would all have to be provided. Paradoxically, apart from the obvious security considerations, the construction of special 'villages' both within and outside of the reserves, and the erection of concentrated labour lines on estates during the Emergency, were calculated to detribalise workers by relocating them with their families near to their place of work. It was thought that this would ultimately sever workers' ties to the reserves and make them more dependent on their employers. There was also some 'negative'<sup>17</sup> stabilisation as workers became reluctant to return to their native reserves on annual leave in face of security measures to restrict their movements. The supply of foodstuffs from workers land holdings was severely curtailed by these restrictions and fuelled demands for cultivation rights on the plantations.

From the late forties the Labour Department worked to promote the benefits of a more stable workforce supported by higher wages, to facilitate greater and more qualitative output. This policy had been first implemented on the docks during the fifties. The state had exercised a great deal of control over this process, a task made more difficult in agriculture due the predominance of private capitals. The hope was that this would catch on in other sectors of the economy once its superiority had been demonstrated. This was only partially realised and then only with the greatest difficulty given the crisis of accumulation in agriculture and the problems of footing the bill for such a transformation.

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<sup>14</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/77: L.D.A.R. 1952, p.22.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/75: L.D.A.R. 1951, p.5.

<sup>17</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/79: L.D.A.R. 1953, p.21.

The Labour Commissioner, E.M.Hyde-Clarke, told the Legislative Council in 1949 that "We have got to achieve a stable and contented labour force, because without stability and contentment we shall never do anything to increase our output"<sup>18</sup> and further urged "very much better supervision" underlined by stability. This vocalised a creeping realisation that social relations were important. The reproduction of labour power was embedded within the community, saturated with complexity and inextricably bound to the manner of its expenditure in production. The ways in which workers were housed, how they combined their own cultivation with wage labour, how they accumulated the resources for bride wealth and social security, and their associations with one another outside of work all shaped the ability of planters and labour officers to control production and maintain their dominance. The Labour Department had awakened to these problems soon after its inception and an uphill struggle was engaged with myopic and recalcitrant employers to bring home to 'capital as a whole' the necessity of restructuring the ways in which workers lived as a prerequisite for reorganising the labour process itself. This was the road to qualitative leaps in the productivity of labour. The employers were driven by the raw impulses of their crisis which the Labour Department attempted to canalise by awakening their interest in 'labour as a social phenomenon'.<sup>19</sup> In buying hitherto anonymous individual units of labour power the employers were purchasing a social being with all manner of ties and connections. They had therefore to interest themselves on what was going on outside of work as much as what was happening for its duration. These preoccupations were taken up in the Carpenter Report, which urged the payment of a wage 'sufficient to provide for the essential needs of the worker and his family', regular employment, family housing and security for the worker's old age.<sup>20</sup>

The Labour Department promoted this outlook with visits to estates where conditions were particularly bad. Its officers urged employers to tie their assertion of control to changes in the two most fundamental locations of working life, the workplace and the residence. These were to be linked to the creation of a settled 'elite' of residential labourers who would be privileged to the status of a 'labour aristocracy'. Whilst plantation labour would always include a large and fluctuating seasonal group of casuals, a settled cadre was required to set the pace, discipline and standards for the rest. Settlers had less need for independent squatters with extensive stock and cultivation requirements and instead wanted a smaller core of settled labourers who would use little or no land

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./ Legislative Council Debates, 21 December 1949, pp. 638-43.

<sup>19</sup> F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/4: Report of the Committee on African Wages [1954]; Rhodes House/ ACJ/21/4: Marjorie Nicholson, 'Kenya - Report of the Carpenter Committee on African Wages', 13 June 1954.

and owe them the majority of their labour time.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, whilst evolution was in the direction of a full time rural proletariat, the settler planters were unable and unwilling to pay the higher wages this demanded.<sup>22</sup>

Housing this cadre in purpose built accommodation with an infrastructure of on site facilities such as shops, club houses, schools and medical care, was necessary to make them both sedentary and reconciled to intensified production and supervision. There was also the carrot of old age provision as 'many' coffee and sisal estates allowed selected workers 'who are too old to work to remain on the estate'. They were provided with free housing, a small plot to grow vegetables, rations and 'usually' received a small monthly payment.<sup>23</sup> These arrangements were calculated to withdraw workers' choices about their patterns of working and give the owners total sway over labour time. Workers would have to remain and bow to the routines imposed by the employers. It was in opposition to the conditions and moulding of this sedentarisation that workers took to trade unionism.

Investment into improving the quality of accommodation on labour lines had to go hand in hand with stabilising the workforce by making contracts more permanent, though the reverse trend set in as these became more short term. Privileging an 'elite' of workers also meant isolating them as far as possible from the 'residuum' of casual labour, a layer that was in and out of work and whose subsistence was uncertain. The latter were attached to their employers only while they were working, so their loyalties were highly transient. Above all, the interaction between casuals and permanent workers threatened to spread the contagion of labour unrest whenever it arose. It was here that the political intent of stabilisation was at its most glaring, since in seeking to isolate plantation workers from the tides of rural discontent, it was also attempting to tear these workers from Mau Mau support networks within which many were embedded. Casual labour nourished these

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<sup>21</sup> The Resident Labourers Ordinance was enforced from 1944, though the attack on squatters rights reached a peak after the war. This limited amounts of stock and compelled the squatter to work for 240 to 270 days a year for their employers. Those who refused to agree to the new terms could be forcibly removed. By and large settlers' were able to effectively divest themselves of surplus labour. There was no place for landless squatters in the African reserves since the growth and differentiation of the peasant sector had led to land hunger and congestion. They then faced the choice of either demanding land rights elsewhere, such as the White Highlands', or abandoning their semi-proletarian status to go down the road of wage dependency.

<sup>22</sup> S. Stichter *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, p.128; A.Clayton and D.Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya*, pp. 305-10.

<sup>23</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/1: Thika Labour Officer's Annual Report, 1959; The incidence of this provision was soon to change as 'the process of "weeding out" labour, necessitated by increased wage levels which it is anticipated will shortly be demanded by the newly formed Plantation Workers' Unions, would necessarily involve the old and infirm - many farmers feel they will no longer be able to fill the role of benevolent employer as in the past.' K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, April 1959.

connections. Hence the aim was protect the labour process by replacing these workers with a permanent labour force. This was one side of a powerful contradiction whose opposite emerged as workers themselves came into conflict with their transitory migrant status. Kikuyu workers in particular were residing in congested reserves and had become embroiled in land disputes. With their margin of subsistence in the reserves all but gone, they were wage dependent. These problems fuelled workplace struggles under circumstances where the absence of trade union organisation became the principal obstacle to settling disputes. Trade unions, along the lines recommended by the state were thus envisaged as vehicles for transforming workers grievances and anger into a negotiable set of issues.

By 1958 'many' farmers were 'generally beginning to realise more and more the importance of a stable and contented labour force', and that 'this would be assisted by the building up of a labour force of complete family units, and the provision of welfare amenities such as schools, recreation rooms, etc.'<sup>24</sup> Thika's labour inspectors reported that 'continual improvements in housing standards were apparent' on estates throughout the district. There was a growing realisation that this was essential to raising productivity and ensuring the high quality of coffees for export. Investments were earmarked for the improvement and extension of labour lines, and the construction of leisure facilities. Though as growers became more pressured by the economic crisis bearing down on the industry and the uncertainties of approaching independence, these plans were widely suspended or abandoned altogether.

'Most progress'<sup>25</sup> was visible on estates owned by Socfinaf. At it's Oaklands estate in Ruiru, the manager was having problems with workers who 'as soon as they have obtained Passbooks, desert to other estates or try to get to Nairobi'. Nonetheless, he was set 'to build up a permanent labour force here of married families who will completely identify themselves with the estate and remain on it'.<sup>26</sup> The District Officer advised him that the policy of 'centralising labour forces on farms must be

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<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, March 1960. Thika's Labour Office reported glowingly on the facilities at Karakuta Estate that had 'constructed a Social Hall for camp labour and invited neighbouring farms to use it. There is a monthly charge of 50 cents per head which is given to Welfare Funds and administered by the selected representatives from each farm. The estate has contributed several amenities such as a wireless set, gramophone, playing cards, games and footballs. A bar is installed and a beer licence is operated. A farm shop has been installed, and hot food and drinks are obtainable. There is also a football field and net ball pitch.'

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: B.G.Ellison to District Officer, Ruiru, 14 February, 1958.

<sup>26</sup> K.N.A./DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: B.G.Ellison to District Officer/ Ruiru, 14 February 1958.

continued'<sup>27</sup>, and that the scattered farm accommodation characteristic of the pre-Emergency period was to be avoided. <sup>28</sup> Correlative to the employers' productivity drive was the state's concern to intensify the control of labour in the post-Emergency period by retaining, if reforming, some of its features. The manager of the company's Mchana Estate, also in Ruiru, was 'anxious to build up a resident labour force based on family units, preferably chosen from among the land less people in the Reserve'. <sup>29</sup>

While this investment had become compelling it was beyond the pockets of all but the largest concerns.<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, under the new conditions of the late fifties cheap labour was unsustainable, with the prevalence of a falling rate of profit leading to a vicious circle of low wages and low productivity. Yet escape from this quagmire remained elusive as planters were largely cash strapped and capital deficient and, confronted by the wild fluctuations in coffee prices, seemed unable to commit the resources necessary for stabilisation.<sup>31</sup> This problem was by no means peculiar to the agricultural sector as it tended to plague the Kenyan economy as a whole. According to former Labour Commissioner E.M.Hyde-Clarke "everyone was in favour of a stabilised African work force but no one wanted to pay for it".<sup>32</sup> On the coffee plantations it was thought that a small cadre could be privileged at the expense of extracted surpluses from the rest, though the margins of such extraction were too narrow to attempt such differentiation. The stabilisation of the crystallising rural proletariat was an insoluble problem and one that promised to devour huge resources on a scale unexampled.

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<sup>27</sup> K.N.A./DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: District Officer/ Ruiru to B.G.Ellison, 11 March 1958.

<sup>28</sup> Concerns over trespass and internal security had initially stirred moves towards concentrated accommodation during the Emergency. Anxious at illicit brewing and consumption on estates, Thika's District Commissioner suggested 'that liquor permits be confined to brewing and consuming at approved buildings and only during the hours of daylight...'. K.N.A./AMC/7/14/ Donyo Sabuk District Association: Minutes of Meeting, 3 November 1954. Even with the relaxation of security regulations, he urged 'frequent checks' on labour lines for strangers and drinking. K.N.A. /AMC/7/14/ Donyo Sabuk District Association: Minutes of Meeting, 26 November 1958.

<sup>29</sup> K.N.A./DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: J.A. Lindsay/ Manager of Mchana Estate to the District Officer/Githunguri Division, 8 April 1958.

<sup>30</sup> Socfinaf were apparently making 'great progress' with the construction of 'housing camps' on their estates. These were 'permanent type' houses built in stone with 'Ardex' roofing. They replaced the old type mud and wattle rondavels. K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1960.

<sup>31</sup> As purpose built estate housing, Finnemore Rondavels were not inexpensive at more than £200 per unit.

<sup>32</sup> A. Amsden, *International Firms and Labour*, p.49: Interview conducted by Alice Amsden in 1966.

### *The Moloch Demands for Kikuyu Labour*

At first, European settler planters welcomed the Emergency as it facilitated the reorganisation of relationships with their squatters, 'the final solution to an age old problem'<sup>33</sup>. With reported Mau Mau ceremonies on 'some estates', the Donyo Sabuk Association wanted a complete prohibition on all K.E.M. workers in the area. In a resolution that epitomised the settlers concern for security, the association urged 'the authorities to make an order that no Kikuyu may be employed, reside or have residence under any circumstances in Donyo Sabuk Ward, and such an order to take immediate effect south of the Athi Bridge and be extended within three months to the whole ward'.<sup>34</sup> Very soon the initial benefits of repression were transformed into severe handicaps relating to the inferior quality of the labour power that was used to replace detained K.E.M. males. Many employers became partially disabled, since those workers most primed and attuned for the changes on the way were those that presented the highest security risk.

The detention and restriction of entire cadres of Kikuyu workers was an inestimable setback to those employers facing the necessity to transform their productive forces in the harshly competitive environment of the fifties. From the Kikuyu came many of the country's 'most industrious and intelligent workers and those most likely to form the basis of a stable labour force'.<sup>35</sup> Prior to the Emergency, they had made up approximately one-third of all workers in waged employment.<sup>36</sup> On the plantations of Central Province this was to have a serious impact since the Kikuyu embodied years of experience in coffee growing in all its phases. Whilst the employers had previously been dependent on them, these workers were now 'limited in the areas to which they may go'.<sup>37</sup> Operation Anvil in particular left many employers traumatised by the sudden removal of large parts of their labour forces.<sup>38</sup> Despite the security risk, their absence evidently had a damaging and destabilising effect on the course of production. This was compounded by the difficulties of recruiting new labour and the imposition of strict controls on the employment of K.E.M. males. After screening and detention had torn them from the workplace, the subsequent dilution of the rural proletariat caused insoluble problems for renewal.

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<sup>33</sup> F.Furedi, *Mau Mau War in Perspective*, p.130.

<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/14/ Donyo Sabuk Association: Meeting of 3 November 1954.

<sup>35</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/81: L.D.A.R. 1954, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/77: L.D.A.R. 1952, p.5.

<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./AF/3/1/ Rural Wages Committee, 1955-8: Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Kiambu, Nyeri and Nanyuki Labour Officers, 26 March 1956.

<sup>38</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/312 /Anvil Detainees Information to the Public, 1954.



The mass removal of such large numbers of K.E.M. males from centres of employment also created huge upheavals and ruptures in the labour market. This pushed the wage earning function in many families onto women, who to a great extent resumed their wartime role as the mainstay of the seasonal labour force. Women had a double burden to bear, as breadwinner with home and family to keep together, often in the absence of their partners. They had to bring their children to work with them, hence the widespread incidence of child labour, though children 'often broke trees and picked everything they could touch.'<sup>39</sup> The coffee planters relied on 'very considerable numbers of casual female labour'<sup>40</sup> who came in daily from the reserves for picking. There are no figures available but apparently 90% of the women available for work from the locations bordering Kiambu's settled area regularly came out for picking. Such a large turnout was not immediate since the direct response of women workers to the Emergency in 1952 was not to show at all. Such was the strength of anti-government feeling that this, combined with police molestation, initially had the opposite effect of keeping them in the reserves. According to Minister of Labour Richard Luyt, even as late as May 1958 'about' 45,500 African women and 33,000 African juveniles were still employed on European farms and plantations on monthly ticket contracts. At that time, the average female wage for 30 working days was 43/- 'inclusive of the value of rations' with an average working day of 'between 4 and 6 hours'.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, the acute labour shortages in the Rift Valley, Central Province and Nairobi Extra-Provincial District led to competition for any sort of labour that offered itself. This was ameliorated to some extent by replacement workers from Nyanza and Machakos, though according to the Labour Department 'many of these' showed a 'marked disinclination for steady work and wandered from job to job offering their services to the highest bidder'.<sup>42</sup> Even amidst the vicious repression of the Emergency's early years, these workers were quick to realise their new value and 'not slow in demanding higher wages'.<sup>43</sup> Wage labour for these workers empowered them to leave as soon as they had earned their 'target' causing intractable problems for the work of the Rural Wages Committee<sup>44</sup>, as higher wages simply enabled them to depart earlier for their rural households.

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/11/Coffee Planters Association: District Commissioner/Thika to Labour Officer/Thika [enclosure 92].

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> E.A.S. 30 May 1958: 'Minister's reply on farm labour'.

<sup>42</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/79: L.D.A.R. 1953, p.21. According to Orde Brown, the idea of continuous employment for such workers was 'entirely strange, and in fact repellent, to his mentality'. Major G. St.J. Orde Brown, *Labour Conditions in East Africa*, p.5-6, 1946.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>44</sup> K.N.A./AF/3/1/Rural Wages Committee 1955-8: 'Rural Minimum Wage'. This was set up in 1955 on the recommendation of the East Africa Royal Commission Report to address the exclusion of agricultural workers

Furthermore, they could use their access to land as power to resist discipline within the workplace and undermine the drive by Capital for greater efficiency. Attempts to raise production and intensify discipline was more likely lead to an exodus of this type of labour, as actually occurred.

The situation at the Criticos owned Kiaora coffee estate in Ruiru revealed the flouting of restrictive regulations on the movement and employment of K.E.M. workers that had become widespread by the late fifties. Early in 1958, Criticos had requested clearance from the district officer to recruit 300 labourers from Nyeri, with preference 'given to families and then to women'. The intention of the estate was to 'keep these labourers permanently'. They offered 30/- a month for men, 22/- for women and 12-15/- for children with free rations and housing, though the required labour was not forthcoming. The management were 'short of hand power' and facing a 'real disaster'<sup>45</sup> as they expected a harvest of 350 tons of coffee and 2,000 tons of pineapples 'almost in the same time'.<sup>46</sup> This employer's appetite for Kikuyu labour transcended any consideration for restrictions or the practice of working closely with the labour, district and passbook offices. An inspection carried out in October 1958 revealed that 'large numbers' of the estate's workers had no pass books or residence permits and few 'if any' of these men possessed loyalty certificates. To cap it all, the 'entire labour force appears to be anti-government and against their own employers'. There were also 'large numbers' of children living on the estate 'without authority and without their parents'. According to the district officer tembo brewing was also 'rampant'. He lamented that 'no amount of police raids would break up the present situation' and ordered the 'proper control of labour'.<sup>47</sup> There were no labour lines and he urged that work to build a new labour camp should commence in earnest.

These problems lay at the source of the employers agitation for a freer labour market where labour power of a different type would become available. The bearers of this were overwhelmingly K.E.M. who had few other goals beyond the wages upon which increasingly large numbers were entirely dependent. They were furthest along the road towards internalising the working patterns and routines of wage labour than workers from other parts of Kenya, who had been less exposed to these changes and were more tied to domestic forms of agrarian production. Towards the end of 1955, conditions had become somewhat stabilised, with a more settled wage pattern, less labour turnover

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from minimum wage provisions.

<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: G.Criticos to the District Officer/Ruiru, 11 July 1958.

<sup>46</sup> These were estimated harvests from 600 acres of coffee and 300 acres of pineapples.

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./ DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: O.Jeffreys, District Officer/Ruiru to the District Commissioner/Thika, 27 October, 1958.

and employers managing with greatly reduced labour forces. In the closing years of the decade, the relaxation of restrictions 'produced a certain amount of movement of labour', easing both pressures on employers and relieving the social distress caused by the poor economic state of the reserves. After careful vetting, K.E.M. male coffee pickers were used in 1957 for the first time since the beginning of the Emergency.<sup>48</sup>

### *The Attack on Resident Labour*

With male K.E.M. workers out of the way, reliance on female labour from the reserves was combined with the recruitment of Kamba pickers, often on resident labour contracts from Machakos and Ukambani. These workers acquired a reputation for stripping green cherry and damaging trees. This green coffee had to be either thrown away or dried as buni<sup>49</sup>, and was often left unsorted and sold on. This undermined the quality of the crop and betokened a lower selling price. By 1959, there was widespread discrimination against Kambas in the labour market as the employers sought 'a better standard of picker'. A councillor from Machakos African District Council alleged that whilst there was a recognised statutory minimum in Thika district of 65/- per debe, the going rate for Kikuyu pickers was 75/- whilst Kamba workers received just 50/-.<sup>50</sup> The struggle with these workers was at source both over surplus labour time and the quality of their labour power. This took the form of concerted attempts to reduce to a minimum the time they spent tending to their residential plots and stock.

Inspections carried out during 1959 revealed that just 16 estates, mostly concentrated in Donyo Sabuk, were employing 'about' 700 resident labourers on valid contracts, a dramatic decline on previous estimates. The coffee planter, 'generally speaking', was keen to 'eliminate stock'<sup>51</sup> and employ resident labour with reduced cultivation rights alongside of workers on monthly tickets. The most important of the few remaining 'shrines' to the resident labour system was the Donyo Sabuk [1958] estate, which combined coffee and sisal production and extended over 13,000 acres bordering the Kamba reserve. It employed 220 attested resident labourers, representing ninety per cent of its labour force. The geographical situation of the estate raised special problems in connection with the control of stock, as most of the labourers came from adjoining locations and were able to move their

<sup>48</sup> K.N.A./ DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9: O.Jeffreys, District Officer/Ruiru to the District Commissioner/Thika, 27 October, 1958.

<sup>49</sup> This refers to coffee 'parchment' dried from pulped cherry.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./ AMC/ 7/11/ Coffee Planters Association: Enclosure 162.

<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./AF/ 1/1: Thika Labour Officer's Annual Report, 1959.

stock between the reserve and the estate with impunity. Resident labourers were grazing some 1,400 head of authorised stock on approximately 8,000 acres of the estate 'which, they have come to regard not unnaturally, as their own land.' There had been efforts over a long period to end these 'privileges' on the estate as part of a campaign to prohibit stock throughout the area in keeping with established policy in the rest of Thika District.<sup>52</sup> At a baraza held on January 11th 1959, the management told 'some 90' labourers that they 'might consider not renewing their contracts if they did not put up a better performance in their work'. Unable to tolerate workers who were unwilling to give their undivided time to the estate, the management was edging towards eviction.

This had a deep impact on Kamba labourers who had a strong herding tradition. Many had brought their stock from Machakos with them to take up contracts as resident labourers during the Emergency. By the beginning of 1960 many estates were terminating these contracts to move these troublesome workers on and take advantage of the influx of Kikuyu onto the labour market. The productivity drive dictated the departure of these workers as the demand went out for Kikuyu labour. There was a widespread assumption that the latter had been taught a lesson and could now be set to work as a compliant and disciplined workforce. Production came first and those best suited to it were sought out everywhere. Kamba squatters responded with a stubbornness few had anticipated. 'Many' would not shift because they had 'no land in Ukambani' and more than a few had lived on the estates all their lives. With continuous instances of discharged labourers refusing to quit estates, 'a number' of estate owners had invoked the Resident Labourers Ordinance [sections 18 and 19] to secure their removal. The district's Livestock Officer seemed to provide the employers with the excuse they were looking for, that the spread of a foot and mouth outbreak from Kamba herds to other stock in the area was becoming a serious threat. A prohibition was issued that after July 1st 1960 'all stock' belonging to resident labourers must be 'disposed of'<sup>53</sup> in all the Nairobi County Council Wards, with the exception of Donyo Sabuk. This was made under the provisions of a council bye-law, the Resident Labourers Order of 1956.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/14/ Donyo Sabuk District Association: Minutes of Meeting 30 June 1954. The question of acreage cultivation for resident labourers was under almost continuous debate amongst the coffee and sisal growers who dominated the Donyo Sabuk District Association. In June 1954 they resolved that the maximum number of cattle per squatter should be reduced to five, a figure that was rarely adhered to.

<sup>53</sup> K.N.A./DC/TKA/3/26/ General Correspondence, 1957-9; G.D. Leeds, Labour Officer/Thika to W. Webb, Kia Ora Coffee Estate Ltd., Ruiru, 23 January 1958.

<sup>54</sup> K.N.A./ AF / 1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1960.

Thereafter there was a short lived surge of attested resident labourers whose number reached 1,089 by September 1960, though these were on mostly one year contracts where no stock was permitted. The principal incentive of squatter contracts was now a thing of the past. Overall, market forces had triumphed over the 'principle' of family stabilisation. These workers could either remain resident on reduced conditions or 'usually' <sup>55</sup> take up employment on a ticket contract if they wished to continue working on the estate. C.P.W.U. General Secretary, Godwin Wachira complained that, during 1960, 'many' squatters had been attested on contracts with wages as low as 8/- a month. A figure disputed by Labour Officer, John Watts who alleged that there were no resident labour contracts in Thika district at a wage less than 20/- per month, and that the average starting wage for resident labourers was between 25/- and 30/-.<sup>56</sup> Even so, with 'privileges' aside, this was less than half the wage earned by workers on monthly ticket contracts.

By 1961, between 800 and 900 attested resident labourers remained in the district. Some 500 of these were to be found in the Donyo Sabuk, now 'the only ward' in the district where resident labour stock was permitted. By this time 'all' resident labourers were Kambas and whilst the Machakos 'authorities' had agreed in principle to the return of their 'excess' stock, they were unable to accept it because of scarce grazing land in the area. This situation had persisted for many months and led to 'a very justifiable grievance' on the part of resident labourers who wanted to 'return home' taking their herds with them. They were very reluctant to dispose of any of their stock by sale, 'but would willingly take it back to the reserve given the opportunity.' This created intractable problems for employers who were straining at the leash 'to eliminate' the resident labour system on their estates.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Labour Market: Landlessness, Unemployment and Resistance*

Whilst Emergency regulations<sup>58</sup> had inhibited the mobility and flexibility of labour markets with draconian restrictions on the freedom of movement, the relaxation of these controls enabled workers

<sup>55</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, November 1960.

<sup>56</sup> K.N.A./VK/24: J.Watts/ Labour Officer/Thika to the Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 6 October 1960.

<sup>57</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Resident Labour Inspector's Report, May 1961.

<sup>58</sup> All members of those tribes working, or seeking work, outside their native land units were compelled to obtain the 'History of Employment' document, commonly referred to as the 'Green Card'. This contained particulars of identity, together with details of current and previous employment. By the end of the 1953, a total of 123,199 such documents had been issued. A special 'passbook' for K.E.M. workers was introduced the following year to replace this document. It incorporated the features of the 'Green Card' along with spaces for residence and movement permits, effectively an authority for the holder to be in a prescribed area. Any change in employment required the attendance of both the worker and an employer's representative at the

to leave their reserves and districts in search of employment. At the same time, employers were seeking more rigid controls over the workplace than in the past. So, that while the dictatorship over labour was relaxed in one quarter, the struggle was on to tighten its grip within another. Workers needed to be sifted and selected for their suitability to a much intensified labour process, according to their 'skills' and performance, a task facilitated by their greater mobility. The quantity and quality of labour power were together of a premium. The employers also needed to weigh 'adaptability' and 'flexibility'. Would workers do and go 'as and when required', and at whatever rate of pay the employers deigned to offer? In response to this, the overall trend was of workers refusing control, whether as individuals competing on the labour market or collectively on the estates, where a most powerful indignation was summoned. An irreconcilable mood was present both in strikes and in what workers were prepared to accept on the labour market. On both accounts, workers were struggling to set narrower limits to the sale and exploitation of their labour power at a time when the employers were seeking ultra flexibility. This threatened to diminish opportunities for a more intense extraction of surplus value at a time when many employers were straining to make more exacting demands of their work forces.

By 1957, overpopulation and soil erosion had combined with land registration and the consolidation of fragmented holdings initiated by the Swynnerton Plan to create 'a large surplus and unemployed population'<sup>59</sup> in the Kikuyu reserves. The government's policy of 'banking on the strong ones' had opened up the broadest gates to emerging African petty capitalist farmers to accumulate at the expense of their poorer brethren who were choking on the narrowness of their land area in the reserves. As the more backward and smaller farmers sold out their bits of land, there emerged in the capacity of principal purchaser the rural bourgeoisie in the making. The pressures on land use and the inability of the reserves to support a rising and socially differentiated population, gave impetus to the lifting of restrictions on the mobility and supply of labour. Quite apart from the employers agitation for freer access to K.E.M. labour, it had become imperative for confined Kikuyu to be allowed to seek work in the settled areas to relieve the pressure of unemployment and the crisis of rural excess population. These changes, combined with the release of detainees, put large numbers on the road to proletarianisation.

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Passport Control Office. The issue of passbooks and the associated control measures were operated by the district and provincial administration working in close liaison with the Labour Department's Central Registration Office and Employment Records Section.

<sup>59</sup> K.N.A./DC/NKU/5/2: 'Population Pressure and Unemployment', H.de Warrenne Waller/District Commissioner/ Nakuru to Provincial Commissioner/ Rift Valley Province, 16 September 1959.

In 1955, the Rural Wages Committee had pinpointed 'an artificially dangerous "surplus" of labour', which the typical employer believed was 'waiting in the Reserve to come out on his terms'.<sup>60</sup> Whilst plantation workers had been hitherto compelled to accept the current 'low signing on rates and low ration scales', there were fears that once controls were lifted these 'dangers' would assert themselves as the seller gained the upper hand in the labour market outside the reserve. The Senior Labour Officer in Central province believed it 'certain' that, given an unbounded labour market, this 'surplus' would 'quickly become a shortage' and that workers would demand rates of pay not less than those obtainable in the Rift Valley.<sup>61</sup>

During 1956-7 controls over the movement of labour were partially relaxed<sup>62</sup>, allowing 14,600 more Africans to enter reported employment. In agriculture, this increase took place mostly among regular monthly ticket workers rather than fluctuations in the casual labour force. Thousands of men 'eager to get back to work' were 'besieged by selection teams from farms and estates in the Rift Valley, Uasin Gishu, Kericho and other areas'. The mass movement of families was approved to satisfy the 'great demand for Kikuyu farm labour' and 'bulk movements' were ordered to satisfy this moloch like thirst. According to the District Commissioner in Kiambu, 730 had already been sent on their way by the middle of July 1957, with a further 5,000 being prepared. Over the previous year, 3,000 families representing approximately 15,000 people had moved out of the Kiambu area. Many had found work in forestry and government sponsored irrigation schemes. Others had gone to farms in the Rift Valley and Nyanza district.<sup>63</sup>

Typically, in Nyeri 'thousands of Kikuyu mostly in the 20/40 age group' left the district after the revocation of the Emergency restrictions 'to visit friends', to see Nairobi and 'to review employment prospects in other districts'. Whilst the number of 'workseekers' steadily increased throughout 1959-60, there was a marked trend for them 'to be selective as regards the type of work and the area of employment'. There were strong indications of what workers were looking for and what they would be prepared to fight for. For the Mwea Irrigation Scheme, the management were able to

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<sup>60</sup> K.N.A./AF/3/1/ Rural Wages Committee, 1955-8: 'Rural Wages', Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Kiambu, Nyeri and Nanyuki Labour Officers, 26 March 1956.

<sup>61</sup> K.N.A./AF/3/1/ Rural Wages Committee, 1955-8: 'Rural Wages', Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Kiambu, Nyeri and Nanyuki Labour Officers, 26 March 1956.

<sup>62</sup> Some Emergency restrictions on movement were retained. K.E.M. workers were still required to obtain a seven day pass from their district officer to search for work in the settled areas and to carry a passbook with either a valid residence permit, or a movement permit if they opted to reside at their place of employment or commuted from the reserve.

<sup>63</sup> E.A.S., 7 July 1957.

recruit only 35 men on a project that required 250 labourers. Whereas a report for April 1960 from Nyeri Urban District Council revealed that 'up to one hundred in a day'<sup>64</sup> were applying to it for work. A guaranteed monthly minimum wage, more appealing work and the opportunity to live in or near the township seems to have lured workers, no longer prepared to accept a downtrodden condition, towards this type of employment. At Plovers Haunt in Ruiru, the manager complained to the labour office that ten workers sent to the estate in August 1958 were unemployable. After coffee picking, they had 'completed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the task done by all my own labour', and as to mulching only '10-25% of the normal tasks' were finished. Before the estate could sack them, they left 'at their own request'.<sup>65</sup> This was hardly symptomatic of defeat and demoralisation but of a confident mood oozing with resistance and protest that was to fuel the plantation strikes around the corner.

Soon after controls on the movement of labour were lifted, unemployment while partially relieved in the reserves, became a social problem in the settled areas as well. After labour shortages were eased, a 'glut' in the labour market was evidenced. The districts in Central Province were flooded with 'workseekers', and there was much opposition in the Rift Valley to 'a huge floating unemployed population circulating around the farms in search of work'.<sup>66</sup> The spectre of large scale repatriation raised its head, not only of those migrating, but of 'mostly young men' who were originally of Kiambu origin. Though they had been born and brought up in the settled areas of Nakuru district, 'nevertheless it has been found desirable to remove them from the district and to repatriate them to the reserves,' in Kiambu.<sup>67</sup>

These fears led to the establishment of labour exchanges where there were none. This was a way of controlling vagrancy and registering the 'idle', by encouraging them to domicile in the district. The problem of footloose unemployed K.E.M. was believed to be 'a very major one' involving 'several tens of thousands of these landless or near landless people'. A 'large surplus, landless, unemployed population in the Central Province' had far reaching consequences for Nakuru and the Rift Valley as a whole.<sup>68</sup> The District Commissioner in Nakuru recognised that 'discontent not respecting provincial or district boundaries' would result. The considerable numbers of these

<sup>64</sup> K.N.A./VK/6/5: 'Survey of Unemployment', W.M.P.Heath-Saunders/ Labour Officer/Nyeri to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 27 May 1960.

<sup>65</sup> K.N.A./ DC/TKA/ 3/26/General Correspondence, 1957-9: Manager, Plovers' Haunt Ltd. to Thika Labour Officer, 9 August 1958.

<sup>66</sup> K.N.A./DC/NKU/5/2: 'Unemployed Persons', H. de Warrenne Waller/District Commissioner /Nakuru to Provincial Commissioner/ Rift Valley Province, 17 August 1959.

<sup>67</sup> K.N.A./DC/NKU/5/2: 'Repatriation of K.E.M.', District Commissioner/ Nakuru to Provincial Commissioner / Rift Valley Province, 13 August 1959.

<sup>68</sup> K.N.A./DC/NKU/5/2: 'Population Pressure and Unemployment', H. de Warrenne Waller/ District Commissioner/ Nakuru to Provincial Commissioner /Rift Valley Province, 16 September 1959.



workers who went to work on the plantations took their angers and frustrations at the years of repression and detention with them. This was compounded by their experiences of chronic unemployment and landlessness, which compelled many to join the ranks of the plantation proletariat and play their part in the strikes to come.

As the labour market expanded, employers began 'to replace inefficient labour with employees who were prepared to work a little harder.' The process of sifting and selecting the quality of the available labour power began in earnest, though this immediately ran into problems of what new workers were prepared to accept in return for a 'wage contract'. This process was integral to the employers drive for 'greater efficiency' that created 'a growing number of unemployed' in the Rift Valley. Those initially effected by the easing of the labour shortage in the closing months of 1957 were predominantly Luo and Kipsigis. By April 1958 this was having a severe impact on the intake of K.E.M. , which had not only 'completely ceased' but 'many' families who had been brought into Nakuru district were repatriated to their reserves. Quite apart from this, K.E.M. workers had departed of their own accord 'mainly' because they refused to accept conditions of employment 'agreed' before they left their reserves. 'Many' were determined to obtain work as resident labourers where they could often make £50 to £100 a year from crops in addition to their cash wages.<sup>69</sup>

Returns from Thika's labour exchanges reveal that far from being cowed by detention and unemployment, 'work seekers' generally preferred to be 'idle' than work unconditionally on the employers terms. This disposition generally threatened to undermine the process of 'rehabilitation'. During 1959, whilst the high level of joblessness in Kiambu was less severe in Thika, the incidence of unemployment in the district remained as elsewhere 'voluntary' or 'selective'. At first, workers 'preferred to want and hope' that vacancies would turn up in Nairobi, Kahawa, or the Rift Valley, 'rather than to accept work on the sisal or coffee plantations.' By the end of the year there was a distinct trend of workers leaving estates in the district and by-passing the employment exchange to seek their fortunes in these destinations.<sup>70</sup> The frustration of the labour offices and labour exchanges at not being able to control the labour market during a period of saturation was expressed time and again in their reports during 1957-9. A study of monthly returns from the Thika Labour Exchange

<sup>69</sup> E.A.S. 11 April 1958: 'Farm efficiency causes unemployment - families repatriated.'

<sup>70</sup> There was also something of a reverse trend as 'many' Thika estates reported receiving an average of five or six applicants each day seeking employment during the later part of 1959. This prescribed a diminished role for the African Employment Exchange with many estates filling their vacancies without its assistance.

reveals that despite landlessness and unemployment, work seekers seemed unprepared to accept available work on any terms and conditions and, as monthly reports from the Labour Office repeatedly emphasised throughout 1957-9, exercised 'discrimination' and 'selectivity'.

During 1960 there was evidence of a reverse of previous trends as rising unemployment in Nairobi began to close the escape valve for migrants from the district. For the first time, during October, 'a number'<sup>71</sup> of workseekers from the city had applied to the Thika Employment Exchange for work. The selectivity of prospective workers had to some extent diminished and even sisal cutting was taken more seriously as a work option.<sup>72</sup> By March the second of a series of prolonged waves of plantation strikes had engulfed the area. This reinforced a trend amongst employers to reduce their labour forces 'as much as possible' as workers became 'more "difficult" to handle'. This compounded the problems caused by the 'considerable number' of unemployed in the area.<sup>73</sup> As a result there were a 'large' number of workers turning to the employment exchange, though 'many' were 'not interested' in taking employment away from the district.<sup>74</sup> Once the C.P.W.U. had agreed the season's picking rate with the K.C.G.A. in May, the coffee estates reported 'more than enough labour available'.<sup>75</sup> However, during the following month there was a turn around as 'many'<sup>76</sup> estates made workers redundant after the main crop had been gathered and in response to a further fall in world prices. Nevertheless, during August 'many'<sup>77</sup> coffee estates reported receiving an average of 5 or 6 work seekers a day and in September there was again 'plenty of labour available'<sup>78</sup> with even sisal plantations reporting an adequate labour supply.

By August 1960, a survey completed by the Labour department in Thika district revealed that K.E.M. males had been reinstated back into the plantation workforce on a massive scale. Out of 24,785 Africans labouring on coffee plantations in the area, there 12,765 were men, 10,230 women and 1,788 children. The overwhelmingly majority were K.E.M. workers but with still significant

<sup>71</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, November 1960.

<sup>72</sup> Sisal cutting was especially reviled and in January 'none' of those reporting to the labour exchange 'were prepared to undertake this kind of work.' [K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1960]. The African labour exchange regularly reported that work seekers continued to be to be selective about the nature of the labour they were prepared to engage in. Once again work on sisal plantations was 'usually regarded as being "too hard".' [K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, March 1960].

<sup>73</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, April 1960.

<sup>74</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>75</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1960.

<sup>76</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, August 1960.

<sup>77</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, September 1960.

<sup>78</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, October 1960.

numbers of Kamba [3,516]. Only 303 Luos were present and other tribal groups were barely discernible.<sup>79</sup> This confirmed the trend, increasingly visible towards the end of the Emergency, for the Kikuyu to replace upcountry workers in the local labour market. Plantation employers had taken their opportunities to discharge these workers and replace them with Kikuyu, who was 'considered to be a better worker than his Nyanza counterpart, especially on coffee estates'.<sup>80</sup> These statistics further revealed that men were regaining their pre-eminence in the labour market, replacing women and children as the backbone of the plantation labour force. They brought with them a decade of political experience of dictatorship and repression, but above all the hard school of the detention camp.

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<sup>79</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/11/ Coffee Planters' Association: John Watts, Labour Officer/Thika to the Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 2 December, 1960; See Appendix 36: Anatomy of the Coffee Industry in Thika district giving details of ownership of estates, acreage, tribal and gender composition of the workforce.

<sup>80</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/1: Thika Labour Office Annual Report, 1959.

#### *4. The Rate of Exploitation and the Beginnings of Trade Unionism*

Just as the quality of Kenyan coffees became a pressing issue towards the end of the fifties, so to was the quality and quantity of labour power. Previous anonymity's were to be dispensed with as plantation employers took more interest in who their workers were and where they came from. This was not just linked to the perennial need to determine the numbers of workers required for casual picking labour, but to a tightening rein over the labour process. What workers did while they were working, how they worked, the intensity of the working day, how they recuperated and the measurement of all these factors became burning issues. The harsh curbing of the world market imposed strict coefficients and impelled planters to restructure ways of working and to explore new methods of producing. The internationalisation of the domestic economy was the essential content of these changing relationships and the plantation struggles that came in their wake.

##### *The Wages Question*

Whilst Kenya's coffee planters were virtually helpless in face of fluctuating price levels, they could attempt to exert more control over the price of labour power, the value creating commodity. Labour costs in Kenya, per ton of coffee produced, were much higher than in Brazil and Peru where plantation conditions were 'far more backward', so that while Kenya produced 1% of the world's coffee, 'it was a very high cost producer'.<sup>1</sup> These comparative coefficients were expressed on the world market where rates of profit were averaged more universally than ever before. In particular, labour time was becoming much more 'socially necessary' compelling a rigorous supervision of tasks and time. Nonetheless, the price of labour power was one to be fought over as these changes prompted the entry of workers into the trade union movement, which showed them models of organisation to resist the employers' productionist offensive.

The Carpenter Report had avoided an examination of agricultural wages since this was considered far too difficult to investigate with any degree of approximation. Nevertheless the Rural Wages Committee was appointed, with a briefing to investigate wage levels in agriculture and to consider the desirability of minimum wage fixing. The committee sought an approximate rate of profit after labour power and other costs of production had been accounted for such as taxation, costs of transport and labour recruitment. The difference was due to unpaid labour whose value could only be

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<sup>1</sup> E.A.S. 2 January 1958: 'Kenya farming revolution praised by Minister - challenge of East Africa's problem. Warning on aid'.

realised through competition. Pocketing as much of this as possible was the question that preoccupied the planters. At all costs any minimum wage was to be tied to the efficiency and durability of labour. The wild fluctuations in coffee prices made the committee's work more than difficult, since the planters were set to pass on this unevenness by varying the wages they were prepared to pay. Whilst committee's summary of its findings, completed in 1956, writhed over how to assess a rural minimum wage, it fell short of the Carpenter report's recommendation of a 'family wage', safely opting for an 'adequate' wage 'sufficient to provide for the essential needs of the worker'<sup>2</sup>, or that the cost price of labour power should be roughly equal to the worker's immediate cost of reproduction without account of his family. Having accepted this as a starting point, 'typical' daily and weekly budgets were drawn up to reveal a social cost of labour power that went beyond the outlay of most employers. Rations, cultivation and grazing rights, housing, water supply and amenities were all deliberated and found wanting. What the committee was unable to consider was the value of labour power, something quite different from its cost price and a problem tied to struggles over surplus labour time and the realisation of surplus value through competition.

These issues were subsequently considered specifically within the context of the coffee industry. The Kiambu District Association acknowledged that wages within the industry 'are too low and we are keen to put matters right', and convened a committee of planters representatives from Thika, Ruiru and Kiambu to enquire into 'the whole wage structure'.<sup>3</sup> The committee attempted to consider the cost of living for Africans, the wages paid in other industries and within the African 'land unit'. The Labour Department was unwilling to be seen divulging such information to an enquiry where the agenda was entirely controlled by the employers. The appearance of distance was important, as was its reluctance to relinquish its power over wage setting or to be seen as an intelligence gathering agency on behalf of the employers. The Labour Commissioner advised the Senior Labour Officer to give general information to the committee, 'but you should on no account divulge information relating to particular estates'.<sup>4</sup>

As much as the Labour Department and the employers were weighing these issues, so too were workers themselves. Prompted by the move of an adjacent estate to pay all its commuting labour a parity bonus, 35 women came out on May 12th 1956 at Kiamara coffee estate in Kiambu. Both estates workers were from the same village and were demanding the same bonus as the resident

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<sup>2</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/209/ L.D.98 Strike Reports, 1951.

<sup>3</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30/ K.C.G.A.: J.A.J. Marsden to the Senior Labour Officer/Nyeri, 9 May 1958.

<sup>4</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30/ K.C.G.A.: W.R.C. Keeler to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 26 May 1958.

workforce.<sup>5</sup> This expressed a strong comparability trend in the district, as workers sought to measure their worth with each other and present their generalisations on the value of labour power to their employers. Just as the comparative coefficients of coffee production were asserting themselves, so too were those of the commodity labour power. Averaging occurred as concrete types of plantation labour and their tasks became more uniform. As these processes entered workers' consciousness, so the need for collective organisation to negotiate the price of labour power was given more impulse.

Before the appearance of the plantation unions in late 1959, the negotiation of picking rates had been in the hands of local chiefs who acted as state appointed representatives for the coffee pickers. Whilst they were in the pocket of the employers, they were effectively a layer of African collaborators staffing the lower echelons of the state apparatus. As creatures of the colonial administration, they were used for their aura of traditional legitimacy, though the fabric of tribal society onto which their authority had been grafted was in an advanced stage of decay.

The chiefs seemed to have outlived their usefulness in the field of industrial relations, as happened in their other crumbling spheres of influence. Detribalisation made it more difficult for them to lead communities becoming more divided along class lines. As they became more compromised, the necessity of bringing forward a new layer of 'class collaborationists' became more urgent. Under these conditions the Labour Department increasingly looked towards its trade union bureaucracy, still being groomed for its role for yet another transmutation of indirect rule. Whilst the department had long been devoting its energy to nurturing such a layer, the speed with which the role of union leaders became exposed came as a great shock to it.

It had become the established practice for employers representatives and district commissioners to meet the local chiefs annually, around mid-May each year, at the Ruiru Club to set the picking rate just before the opening of the season. The sliding scale principle was first agreed upon in 1951 before being finally adopted in 1953 as 'the future price of coffee, taking a long term view, seems likely to be downward rather than upward, the present seemed to be the proper moment to get the chiefs agreement to such a sliding scale'.<sup>6</sup> It should be remembered that the chiefs were coffee growers in their own right within the reserves and for that reason privately supported cuts in labour costs. The sliding scale tied the rate paid to labourers per debe of coffee picked, to the market price per ton. In

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<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/213/ L.D.98 Strike Reports, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> K.N.A./AMC/ 7/11/ Coffee Planters' Association: Enclosure 69.

this way the vagaries of the world market were passed on to the workforce. Since the value of the current crop could not be known until it was marketed, a process that was not concluded until the following year, the scale was based on the average price paid for the previous year's crop. This formula was perfectly suited to the planters, entirely dependent on an export crop at the mercy of extreme price fluctuations. If prices were low then wages would fall, and the quantity and quality of picking demanded by the owners had to increase to compensate the losses. The sliding scale operated on prices ranging from zero to £450 per ton of 'clean coffee' and, depending on prices fetched, wages started at 15/- and rose to 55/- per debe. The adoption of such a system was effectively a refusal to any minimum wage fixing in the rural areas and was the principal obstacle to the work of the Rural Wages Committee.

The Labour Commissioner, W.R.C. Keeler, had attended the 1957 meeting, where he 'formed the impression that these meetings were called mainly to announce, and not to determine, the wage rates for the next coffee picking season.' By this time, representatives of African employers were also attending the meetings. Keeler had serious doubts about the sliding scale arrangements, 'which has little association with "collective bargaining" as we know it.'<sup>7</sup> His main fear was the prospect of widespread strikes especially when the picking rate for 1959, 'in view of the fall in the price of coffee', was set at 60 cents per debe,<sup>8</sup> five cents lower than the previous year.

With the emergence of the C.P.W.U., the charade of the 'Annual Chiefs Coffee Picking Meeting' dissolved altogether as the Union fought for its right to negotiate picking rates. The Provincial Commissioner counselled that with the 1960 meeting, 'we must not put ourselves or the Chiefs in a position of appearing to negotiate picking rates with the employers, as this could fairly be said to be the prerogative of the Union. I hope, therefore, that this year's meeting will be largely in the nature of a social gathering...'. He also advised that an 'unofficial' should take the chair at the meeting.<sup>9</sup> Thika's Labour Officer, John Watts, then distanced himself from the occasion and excused his inattendance 'due to pressure of work.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30 K.C.G.A.: W.R.C. Keeler to J. Watts, 24 April 1958.

<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/8: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, April 1959.

<sup>9</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30/ K.C.G.A.: F.R. Wilson /Provincial Commissioner /Central Province to district commissioners /Thika, Fort Hall and Kiambu, 22 March 1960.

<sup>10</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30/ K.C.G.A.: J. Watts to District Commissioner/Thika, 28 March 1960.

### *Supervision and Discipline*

The C.B.K.'s chief liquorer had drawn attention to complaints by German buyers that shipments of Kenyan coffees were inferior to the quality of sale samples. The impairment of quality was to some extent due to the practice of picking 'beans from over bearing trees' by workers under pressure from unrealistic picking tasks.<sup>11</sup> The Labour Department recommended closer supervision of the labour process to reduce the incidence of bad picking.<sup>12</sup> These problems were to some extent due to a declining morale amongst workers as they endured low picking rates, the increased size and scope of working tasks, and the dwindling labour time allotted to achieve them. This was evidenced in the widespread picking of unripe berries. The employers blamed the allegedly low quality of picking for the declining value of coffee and low picking rates, whereas their source lay in falling world prices and attempts by planters to pass these on to their workers.

With quality at such a high premium amongst its customers, the industry began to focus more intently on the labour process and what workers actually did during labour time. The rigorous productivity drives of the employers were a response to the wildly fluctuating prices for the coffee commodity on world markets and intense competition from other exporters. Unstable markets with downward price vagaries enabled planters to realise little more than their costs of production. Their survival strategy was to shrink the workforce and intensify the rate of exploitation for those remaining. The quality and quantity of expended labour power and the measurement of these correlative variables became burning issues.

These necessities focused on close supervision to enforce a more intense and prolonged working day. The spark to a large number of strikes during the fifties and early sixties was the severe work discipline on many estates to drill workers into higher and more qualitative rates of productivity. In these disputes workers' anger at the arbitrary and excessive increases in the size and scope of tasks was directed at harsh supervision and the abusive behaviours of managers and headmen. The refusal to work with unpopular nyaparas and demands for their dismissal also contained a political dimension since not a few of those involved in supervision had been home guards or loyalists.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E.A.S. 24 January 1958: 'Reconstruction plan at coffee mill'.

<sup>12</sup> Coffee seeds were placed in a nursery for two years before the seedlings were then planted out. To maintain quality, it was necessary to leave the cherry unpicked for the first four years of planting out.

<sup>13</sup> F.Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*, p.166. Cooper argues that on the docks there was more 'give and take' within the labour process between labourers and supervisors. There seems little evidence for this on the coffee plantations, where workplace divisions between workers and nyaparas were reinforced by a fierce productivity drive and political differences. Those few instances where these divisions broke down, far from being due to a community of aim, were due to a collapse of managerial authority and a desertion by headmen to the side of the strikers. See Chapter 5 for an example of this.



By 1960 the rationalisation of coffee production on the basis of new technology was less in evidence. Employers were generally reluctant to risk large scale investment given the uncertainties accompanying the approach of independence. The preferred option was labour intensive production to increase surplus labour time. There was a particular intolerance amongst them over the short working day that workers had set for themselves over a long period. Workers were turning in anything from 3 to 8 hours a day and there was much unevenness in routine between different plantations. Raising the rate of exploitation was of a premium as employers aimed to impose an 8 hour day, 47 hour week with 7a.m. starts. The practice of the employers in demanding compulsory overtime during peak picking periods provoked some of the earliest challenges from the Union. Flexibility also became an issue as planters sought to broaden the nature and increase the size of tasks. Their obsession for more productivity was raised to virtually scientific status through measured day work as evidenced on Socfinal's plantations where a firm called Industrial Consultants was brought in to undertake a work study exercise.

The 'Report of the Sub-Committee on Wages in the Coffee Industry in Kiambu', commissioned by the Kiambu District Association and completed in May 1958, was dominated by the refrain of increasing productivity as a prerequisite for increasing wages. On reviewing the report, the Provincial Commissioner noted that 'Productivity is relative to supervision'.<sup>14</sup> The employers shortly joined hands with the Labour Department to establish formal training schemes for their lieutenants, to school them in the arts of supervision. The 'Training Within Industry' programmes at the Coffee Research Station at Ruiru, were set up by the Labour Department's 'training section'. They were an essential part of the department's attempt to guide employers rather than be guided by them. Residential headman's courses, usually of 2-3 days duration, were established to 'raise the supervisory standards', establish methods for reducing costs and improving efficiency, and 'through them the working standards of the whole labour Force...'. Amongst the lectures given were 'Qualities of a Good Headman', 'What can Management expect from a Headman?' and 'Difficulties of Management'. The courses included instruction on 'Accurate and Speedy Work', 'Discipline', 'Cost Control and Decreasing Production Costs', 'Loyalty', 'Clear and Prompt Instructions' and 'Labour Laws-Obligations of Employees'. A series of workshops encompassed 'Job Methods', 'Job Relations' and 'Job Instruction' which aimed to improve labour efficiency by reorganising the workforce and restructuring manual tasks.<sup>15</sup> Similar courses were established for headmen in general

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30/K.C.G.A.: F.A.Loyd / Provincial Commissioner's Office to J.A.J. Marsden, 20 August 1958.

<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/11: Residential Supervisory Training Course for Swahili Speaking Coffee Estate Headmen, Jacaranda Coffee Research Station, Ruiru, April 19th - May 6th, 1960; 'T.W.I. Topics', Training Within

agriculture and in the sisal and tea industries. This was further evidence of the trend towards 'scientific' management practice to assert closer control over the workforce to ensure higher and more qualitative productivity. Central to this was the task of separating headman from their charges and selecting those with a loyalist record for supervisory roles. This would give the management a layer of support in direct contact with the workers themselves. They would enable the exercise of management authority at the grass roots as well as a listening post to monitor the mood amongst the workforce.

*First Stirrings: Strikes in Thika and Kiambu* <sup>16</sup>

The parallelism of strikes and the economic upheavals within the plantation economy were of course relative. Subterranean crisis impulses registered themselves on the plantations only after considerable delay. Nonetheless, often imperceptible processes of development were taking place beneath the surface of the repression. Overall, while strikes during the fifties were workplace confrontations, we must examine the spatial context of conflicts socially situated within communities rich in heterogeneity and class composition. In a different context, Alun Howkins has drawn attention to comparable processes involved in the growth of the agricultural workers' union in Norfolk, with the point that beneath 'the apparent calm and ordered relationships of what is called a paternalistic and deferential society there was endemic conflict.... This conflict was local, limited and difficult to generalise. Its centre was the individual farm, the widest support area the village and it's surrounding district.'<sup>17</sup> So it was in Thika and Kiambu.

The Thika district offers us an extraordinary opportunity to peer into the primordial world of class formation brought on by these processes. As an administrative area it covered 890 square miles and by 1960 contained 160 coffee estates located in the divisions of Thika [58], Ruiru [49], Makuyu [25], Mitubiri [20], and Donyo Sabuk [8].<sup>18</sup> These plantations covered 29,502 acres as compared to Kiambu's 222 estates spread over 18,003 acres.<sup>19</sup> The cultivation of sisal in Central Province was confined entirely to Thika where there were just 22 sisal plantations, some growing pineapples as a sideline.<sup>20</sup> The new plantation companies in the district tended to diversify into both coffee and sisal production. Among these were the Donyo Sabuk [1958] estates in Thika, the Kia Ora, Kalimoni and

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Industry, Commerce and Agriculture, Number 9, January 1961 [Labour Department].

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 3: Strikes in Thika and Kiambu, 1947-59.

<sup>17</sup> Alun Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* [London, 1985], p.5.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix

<sup>19</sup> C.B.K., *Kenya Coffee Monthly Bulletin*, July 1960.

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/1: Thika Labour Office Annual Report, 1959.

Machule estates in Ruiru and Kakuzi Fibrelands in Mitubiri. In Makuyu, Punda Milia estate and Sisal Limited also had coffee divisions. Some of the worst working conditions in the area were 'probably' to be found in the Maragua Ridge area of Makuyu, whilst the estates owned by the Socfinaf Company Ltd. were 'among the best'.<sup>21</sup> The local economy was firmly rooted in primary production consisting almost entirely of crops for export, so it was more vulnerable and exposed to the rigours of the world market than perhaps any other in Kenya. Post-war industrialisation in the district had led to the growth of a concentrated industrial enclave with a core of eight large factories servicing the plantation economy. The factory proletariat, though highly concentrated, made up less than 7% of the working population. The following table shows the distribution of these workers amongst the districts' principal factories.

*Numbers in Factory Employment as at August, 1959<sup>22</sup>*

<i>Name of Factory</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Bulley's Tanneries Ltd.	66	2	4	72
Kenya Cannery Ltd.	248	189	-	437
Kenya Paper Mill Ltd.	94	3	-	97
Kenya Chemicals Ltd.	10	-	-	10
East African. Bag & Cordage Co. Ltd	1,644	67	-	1,711
Kenya Tanning Extract Company Ltd.	158	-	8	146
Metal Box Co of East Africa Ltd.	185	68	37	290
Kenya Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Ltd.	83	-	1	84
<i>Totals</i>	2,468	229	50	2,847

The proximity of these factories to the coffee plantations which dominated the district meant that disputes were likely to have reciprocal impacts on urban and rural dwellers throughout the locality. The interpenetrations of plantation and industrial workers were rich in social transitions, with semi-urban workers for instance located in cash crop processing factories situated on or near to plantation estates. By 1960 a menacing symbiosis of urban and rural workers around the township and its environs came into its own as a wave of simultaneous plantation strikes and factory stoppages engulfed the area. This was the outcome of countless, often invisible interconnections established during the previous decade.

<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/1: Thika Labour Office Annual Report, 1959.

<sup>22</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/8: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report for August, 1959.

The processes of class formation in the district made themselves increasingly conspicuous through strike actions. The primordial stirrings of rural workers taking their pedestrian steps into struggle and organisation were a symptom that the old relationships between owners and workers were passing away for good. This caused alarm amongst employers and aroused the state's concern to maintain tight authority over all dimensions of workers lives. Years of complacent ignorance and disinterest, taking for granted replaceable units of seasonal labour power, turned into an obsession with what went on in the reserves. Most worrisome were the marked tendencies of strikes to transcend individual firms and estates and draw in people from the locality. The plantation labour force was firmly embedded in rural communities with close ties to Thika's processing factories and to the urban township. Workplace actions came from workers who had been conditioned as much by their experience in the community. Plantation workers seemed to find their audacity not just from amongst themselves, but from the networks around them and such support was guaranteed to them by the agrarian problem. Networks based on family, clan and community ensured manifold links and connections between rural and urban workers in the mesh of class formation.

What needs to be emphasised is the heterogeneous nature of the plantation proletariat during these years prior to the advent of trade unionism, when the unity of its constituent parts still seemed far away. If its first independent expressions were variegated and discordant, a distinct if contradictory trajectory can nonetheless be discerned. Most of the earliest struggles were related to labour time and were most often caused by employers who were inclined to provoke their labourers with allegations of inefficiency, negligence and substandard work such as the picking of unripe coffee berries or the cutting of immature sisal leaf. By the mid-fifties there were increasing instances of employers attempting to change the system of paying wages from the standard thirty day ticket over to a monthly payment involving 26 working days. This resulted in several strikes<sup>23</sup> which seemed to reflect a move by workers to uphold their right to work when they needed to. That workers had to complete a thirty day ticket did not mean they had to turn up on every working day, but could to some extent vary their attendance over a more extended time period. Under these arrangements they had some control over the completion of their ticket and could adjust their patterns of work to give them a chance to spend time with their families and tend to their shambas. If in the past employers had encouraged this liberty as a condition of the 'rural subsidy', there were now extraneous pressures bearing down on them to rationalise and extract more surplus labour time. With the new system, labourers were made to turn up on every working day of the month.

<sup>23</sup> 600 workers came out at Anglo-French Sisal Estate in August 1953; the dispute at Katunda Estate in Kiambu in November 1955 involved 70 women; 200 workers went on strike at Donyo Sabuk [1958] estate in Thika in April 1959.

Related battles concerned workers rights to vary the intensity of their labour whilst working, which came under severe pressure from low picking rates as well as attempts by the employers to link wage increases to the scale and size of tasks. A crisis in the transmission of authority occurred at Donyo Sabuk [1958] estate where management discharged a headman for marking up tickets for incomplete tasks. Fifty Wambere sisal cutters went on strike on March 14th, 1957 to demand his reinstatement.<sup>24</sup> More often though, workers' tickets were not marked for jobs they were unable to complete under conditions where increased tasks were being demanded. These strikes reflected the struggle of workers to defend their last vestiges of autonomy within the old system. Overall though, as they fought to uphold their semi-autonomous status by resisting proletarianisation, this process nonetheless got the better of them.

Workers were also incensed by a wide range of other problems. The employers' insistence that they provide their own cutting tools and cooking utensils, the absence of on site medical facilities and drinking water, repeated allegations of theft and illegal brewing, the refusal of some employers to issue sick pay, substandard accommodation and violence against woman workers were all the causes of strikes during the decade. Stoppages were often linked to grievances over low pay, wage cuts or unpaid wages, and demands for wage increases. Claims for sick pay, protests at long hours, cash in lieu of rations and poor housing were likewise ritual occurrences.<sup>25</sup> There was also a distinct pattern of protest against insufficient and underweight rations. When prices began to rise many employers sought to offer what they tried to pass off as a cash equivalent of rations in a ploy to avoid meeting the increase, conversely when prices went into decline they attempted to revert back provoking workers demands for cash in lieu of rations. The withdrawal of passbooks, police raids on work camps and arbitrary dismissals were more fuel to the rising tide of indignation.

The drive to increase the rate of exploitation was hardly straightforward and the brutal imposition of edicts to produce more ran into continuous problems. In their resistance to the employers productionist offensive workers in both districts took strikes beyond the limits of protest by advancing significant demands of their own. From the middle of the decade, workers began to bypass previous levels of tolerance and started to find their own voice. This reflected a restlessness at their downtrodden condition characterised by an 'indignation at this abasement'<sup>26</sup>, so that what began as mere protest became something much more, a struggle to pull matters their way and out of the court

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<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/214/ LD.98 Strike Reports, 1957.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 3: Strikes in Thika and Kiambu, 1947-59.

<sup>26</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family*, Marx-Engels Collected Works Volume 4 [London, 1974,], p.37.

of the employers. Beneath the wide variety of grievances and demands, amidst the multitude of causes and promptings, the faint music of the opera to come was just audible as workers crystallised around new axes. Below the surface of repression there signs of regroupment, of a movement in the making that had yet to define clearly what it wanted, but which was saturated with a hatred of what it did not want.

With every desire not to burden our text with figures we cannot refrain from presenting those which illustrate the essential features of an embryonic proletariat growing in the districts. The figures, reduced to their simplest expression relate only to those plantations and enterprises that underwent inspection. We should bear in mind that the reach of the labour officers was not extensive owing to the small size of their support staff at this time, so official figures are likely to underplay the true extent of trade disputes as they occurred in any year. During the period 1947-59 there were 106 officially recorded strikes in these districts. Of these, there were 42 coffee and 23 sisal plantation strikes. The rest occurred in public works, farms, quarries, construction sites, processing factories, breweries, saw mills and engineering workshops.<sup>27</sup> Against this background the recently published assertions of G.Kershaw relating to Kiambu during this period should be treated with extreme caution. According to her unchecked impressions, 'Protests against labour conditions were not among the defence mechanisms of the rural and settled workers; unions did not take root. The only known instance of protest against working conditions was some marginal involvement of women coffee pickers and male unskilled settled area workers in small strikes organised by union members from outside the area in 1947 and 1951. They floundered as strikers were too easily replaced and blacklisted and workers could not afford to take this risk.'<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to Kershaw's assertions, and as the following table shows, strikes were establishing themselves as the principal 'defence mechanism' of workers throughout the district. That trade unionism did not show itself openly until towards the end of the Emergency makes workers propensity for strike action all the more remarkable. We should not discount labour organisation by this fact since informal networks based in the community helped to empower resistance to the employers. Whilst the threat of the sack and the blacklist were undoubtedly a factor, the evidence shows that workers were not unduly phased by them. If anything the primordial spontaneity and indignation that tended to characterise workers responses shows that they often oblivious to such risks. While there were 45 reported stoppages during 1947-51, 28 in Thika and 17 in Kiambu, over

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 3: Strikes in Thika and Kiambu, 1947-59.

<sup>28</sup> G.Kershaw, *Mau Mau from Below* [Oxford, 1997], p.135.

half these [25] can reasonably be considered small scale with less than fifty workers involved. Large scale strikes occurred throughout the period, with the key stoppages in at Kalimoni Estate in Ruiru [1947], Donyo Sabuk Estate [1948], the Nairobi Municipal Council depot in Kiambu and at the Kenya Tanning Extract Company [1949].

*Table showing the number of strikes in Thika and Kiambu districts and the numbers of workers involved in each strike during the period, 1947-51.<sup>29</sup>*

*Numbers of Strikers*

<i>Year</i>	<i>1-50</i>	<i>51-100</i>	<i>101-150</i>	<i>151-200</i>	<i>201-250</i>	<i>251-300</i>	<i>301-350</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Ind.</i>	<i>Tot</i>
.1947.	7			1/160				1/400	6	3	9
.1948.	8	2						1/76	6	5	11
.1949.	7	2	1/150		1/225		1/350		6	6	12
.1950.	2	2		2					2	4	6
.1951.	1	3		1/200					3	2	5
<i>Total</i>	25	9	1	4	1		1	2	23	20	43

Whilst 1948-9 were peak years of strike action throughout the colony, this previous level of energy was dramatically though briefly exceeded during 1952. Thereafter the number of strikes dropped right off to 1-2 in either district between 1953-5. During 1954, the intensity of repression was evidently taking its toll as only a single strike was recorded.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, important strikes occurred at East African Bag and Cordage [1955] and at E.A. Tanning and Extract Company [1956]. These were consolidated during the following year with a clear leap, which sustained itself to light the fuse of the plantation strikes of 1960. There were strong signs of recovery in Kiambu during the course of 1958 when six coffee stoppages occurred. These strikers were stirred into action over excessive tasks and low pay, and provoked by the beatings of women workers suspected of 'subversive activity'. Casual workers also advanced their own demands for parity bonuses with resident labourers. This recuperation continued when during the course of 1958 there were three coffee and four sisal strikes in Thika and two factory strikes, at K.E.M.E. Ltd in Thika's industrial area and at the Bata Shoe factory in Limuru. Both disputes attracted much public attention. During the following year plantation strikes in Thika again dominated the scene.

<sup>29</sup> Statistics compiled from K.N.A./ABK/8/189, K.N.A./PQ/10/24, K.N.A./ABK/8/208 and K.N.A./ABK/8/209.

<sup>30</sup> This was at Kelly's Ltd., a tailors workshop in Thika township. During a recent screening operation, two factory cleaners had been removed. After being ordered to sweep the floor, the tailors refused on the grounds that they were skilled men and it was not their work. They were threatened with dismissal without pay, though the dispute was subsequently resolved after intervention from the labour office.

Though industrial workers were concentrated and smaller in number, they had a major qualitative effect on the surrounding areas, for it was in the factories that working class organisation first took a hold. They then became the transmission belts for this influence into the rural areas. There was a genuine fear of contagion, that factory strikes would spread 'into portions of the working population upon which a fragile regularity had been imposed by contract law and managerial supervision.'<sup>31</sup> Indeed, these seemed to have been the ferment and bacilli which enabled the organised plantation proletariat to make its appearance on the scene.

The first recorded stoppage in Thika involving a trade union was at Kenya Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Ltd. [K.E.M.E.] on the industrial estate where forty Kikuyu factory workers came out on March 5th, 1958 over the late payment of wages and the company's refusal to meet the costs of hospitalisation for workplace injuries.<sup>32</sup> Though the workers were organised in the East African Federation of Building and Construction Workers' [E.A.F.B.C.W.], their first recourse was to the district's labour officer who secured a return to work on the understanding that grievances would be looked into. Members of this union were again involved in strikes over claims for higher wages during the Autumn of 1959<sup>33</sup> at two stone quarries in the area, both involving Kikuyu workers with some participants from Nyanza. In these cases, and in contrast to the K.E.M.E. strike, workers bypassed the Labour Office and made their wage claims through the union. Apparently, the union's general secretary, Arthur Ochwada had gone to V.D. Stone Quarries on the August 29th and called the 168 stone dressers, cutters and clerks out on strike. The Labour Office suspected that the strike was 'an extension of the strike which still persists' in the Kahawa, Njiru and Leila areas near Nairobi.<sup>34</sup> Forty-eight workers at Bekker's Stone Quarry, again in Thika, followed on October 5th and just as they were returning, 66 operatives at three sawmills in the town, all members of the Kenya Timber and Furniture Workers Union, struck work simultaneously. The district was already in the grip of a rolling strike action. The whole area was touched by the inter-territorial railway strike, as the 'the majority' of rail men in Thika stopped work on November 14th in response to the Railway African Union's call for 'a colony wide strike'.<sup>35</sup> Just a week later, on November 22nd,

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<sup>31</sup> K.N.A./AMC 7/11/ Coffee Planters Association: Enclosure 69.

<sup>32</sup> In Kiambu the first dispute involving a trade union was at the Bata factory where 223 members of the Kenya Shoe and Leather Workers Union downed tools over a recognition issue in December 1958.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix 6: Disputes in Other Industries, Thika 1959.

<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/207/L.D.98 Strike Reports, 1959.

<sup>35</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/1: Thika Labour Office Annual Report, 1959.

We should not underestimate the impact of the inter-territorial Railway Strike throughout the East African territories on awakening these and other workers into struggle. The crisis of the plantation economy found consummate expression here as E.A.R.H. attempted to pass it onto the rail men through wage cuts and redundancies. This was partly intended to relieve the planters from crippling freight charges which would



nearly 700 workers attended a meeting at Kenya Cannery Welfare Hall to found the C.P.W.U. and 'to arouse the interest of coffee and sisal workers and to encourage them to join the Unions'.<sup>36</sup> The concentration of strikes in and around the town towards the end of the year seems to have fuelled the conflagration that was to engulf plantations throughout the area.

This seems to have started on December 12th 1959, when 107 Kikuyu labourers at Swahara Farm<sup>37</sup> went on strike, which was apparently called by the newly formed C.P.W.U. 'in protest against the dismissal of one of their members'. The workers had been dissatisfied with their Christmas bonus and incensed that a labourer with a long service record had been victimised for his union membership. He was later reinstated. There had been trouble at the estate earlier in the year when 37 Kikuyu women refused to work on arrival from the reserve on the grounds that they had worked without receiving a bonus which had been paid to women who were permanently resident.<sup>38</sup> In this small but historic strike, organised labour announced its arrival on the coffee plantations. Whether the union actually called the strike is uncertain, it is more likely that this was a 'wild cat' action with the initiative coming from the workers themselves. It set the precedent for the rest of the proceeding period of largely spontaneous unofficial strike actions.<sup>39</sup>

If the preceding strikes appeared sporadic, disconnected and without union organisation, those at the beginning of the new decade reveal an interconnectedness between workers not just on different estates and factories but across Central Province and beyond into the Rift Valley and Kericho district. There were objective processes of integration taking place of a hitherto divided social being, largely unconscious of its strength but with latent power to cohere all its parts and function as a whole. This unity was given coherence by the emergence of trade union organisation, a phenomenon hardly anticipated by the state which regarded rural workers as far too disorganised and backward to take

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reduce the competitiveness of Kenya's plantation exports still further. E.A.R.H. made great play of this danger in an attempt to blackmail the rail men about the effects of industrial action on their brethren working on the plantations, since it 'would obviously be most unfair to raise port and railway charges for these export commodities merely to pay railway staff higher wages if this can be done only by reducing the incomes of people working in the industries that provide the traffic.' [P.R.O./CO 822/2461: Strike by the Employees of the E.A.R.H. Administration, 1960-2: Telegram from the Acting Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State, 5/2/60]. The essence of E.A.R.H.'s severe financial crisis was that it had always functioned as a source of cheap transportation to underwrite the settler planters. Major reinvestment was now required and its Renewals Fund was depleted at a time when it was called upon to hold fast its charges to subsidise the troubled plantation economy. Like Kenya's coffee planters, the E.A.R.H. management went to war with their own workforce in a desperate bid to resolve these problems.

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/8: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, November 1959.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix 5: Coffee Strikes in Thika District, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/8: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, December 1959.

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/207: L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1959.

such a step. All the more panic then, when this unbounded and undifferentiated movement did emerge, and so dramatically in an unprecedented wave of simultaneous plantation strikes which shook the district to its foundations and sent reverberations throughout Kenya. The fact is that workers on the coffee plantations produced from their depths an organisation that approached the immediate dimensions of their struggle.

### *The Origins of the Plantation Unions*

The continuous battles for quotas in a shrinking world market was one war, but a second front opened up as a new antagonist raised its head on the plantations. After years of draconian discipline, oppressive submission and deference, and few rights beyond the whim of their settler employers, estate workers moved into struggle over wages and conditions. Having embarked on this course they then looked around for the tools to take them forward and embraced the forms of trade unionism. With the approach of independence, and undoubtedly hastening it, there was a conscious awakening to organisation as thousands of plantation workers pressed to join trade unions. The President of the K.N.F.U. issued a strong warning to Sotik farmers in August 1958 that "growth of African trade unions in farms is a greater challenge than anything we have met in this country before". Appealing to farmers everywhere to close ranks behind the K.N.F.U., he admonished that the "threat to you of agricultural trade unionism is greater than that of drought, disease or flood." He urged his audience that "we must therefore have a weapon to meet this challenge of trade unionism on the farms. The K.N.F.U. is the farmers only weapon to meet this challenge. Union must be met with union ...."<sup>40</sup> These fears were again vocalised in October 1959 by F.K.E. President, R.J. Hillard, who told farmers at a meeting in Limuru, that the main battle facing the agricultural industry was that of the minimum wage and urged the "need for solidarity among employers in the farming sector to stem any threat from agricultural unions".<sup>41</sup>

In response to the intermittent but continuous labour actions of the fifties, labour officers and employers began to see that beyond the appearances of a disorganised mass was a developing sense of common interest amongst rural and semi-urban workers. At a C.B.K. meeting in March 1958, two main opinions were expressed. Some delegates believed that if employers should organise themselves ahead of the workers, 'they would only invite and speedup workers organisations'. However, the majority 'emphasised urgency' and were 'completely in favour' of establishing a standing committee concerned with industrial relations to confront their new adversary, and 'that this act by the Coffee

<sup>40</sup> E.A.S. 11 August 1958: 'Greatest Challenge to Kenya Farmers - Trade Union Growth'.

<sup>41</sup> E.A.S. 19 October 1959: 'Solidarity Call to Farmers - Wages Battle Looms in Agricultural Industry'.

Industry would give a lead to other agricultural employers to do the same sort of thing.<sup>42</sup> The Kiambu District Association also registered its anxiety at the increasing incidence of strikes and trades disputes in the area. It asked the Labour Office to report 'on the formation and progress of labour societies..., as problems of this nature are becoming of increasing importance and as the Association is devoting a considerable amount of time to ways of alleviating labour difficulties, a periodic report of this nature would be of the greatest value.' Nonetheless, Kiambu's Labour Officer did not think he 'should properly convey such information to an association which is, primarily, one of employers'.<sup>43</sup> It was not that the Labour Department did not share the planters concerns, the issue was one of control over wage fixing and the mediation of industrial relations. The principal difference was that while the Labour Department could envision the inevitability of the trade unionism and free collective bargaining, the employers were manoeuvring to avoid such a prospect.

The Labour Department attempted to push plantation workers into the mould already established for the dock workers. This involved successive attempts during 1955-8 to fragment the dockers' into occupational and sectional components through pay structures, job grading and industrial relations machinery enshrined in the Joint Industrial Council. In this way the dockers grievances were transformed into a negotiable set of issues. Plantation workers were not as disorganised as they appeared to be and there was a danger of workplace organisation emerging, below the surface and beneath the vision of the state, with its roots in migrant labour and community networks that had been politicised by Mau Mau. How could labour officers deal with conflicts where no organisation was visible and where a clear leadership could not be identified? The Labour Department were unable to confront workers who were not organised into clearly structured institutions and recognised that the absence of trade unions had been a serious obstacle to preventing and ending the Mombasa strikes of 1934, 1939, 1945 and 1947.<sup>44</sup>

Prompted by the Labour Department, the move to form plantation unions seems to have been the outcome of exchanges within the F.K.E. Rural Employers Committee with some involvement from the K.F.L. This was a warring coalition of various landed property interests with representatives from the K.N.F.U., tea, sisal and coffee planters often at odds with each other in their scramble for labour power from the reserves. The assembled parties had gathered in haunting anticipation of what they sensed was already in motion. They recognised the inevitability of the spread of trade unionism

<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./AMC 7/11/Coffee Planters' Association: Enclosure 36.

<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./ABK/3/30/ K.C.G.A.: Labour Officer/ Kiambu to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 7 October 1958.

<sup>44</sup> Cooper, F. *On the African Waterfront*. Gives a detailed history of all these strikes.

amongst the agricultural proletariat in the making and wished to control it by establishing unions under their wing from the start. A decision was reached to form individual plantation unions for tea, coffee and sisal. Three organising secretaries were appointed and financed by the I.F.P.A.W. which was allied to the I.C.F.T.U., and a T.U.C. official, Dave Barrett, was seconded to assist the fledglings.<sup>45</sup> This move came just days before the strike at Swahara estate, too late to turn the tide of the struggles that had already begun. In a very real sense, these unions were more the product of the struggles to come than any pre-emptive manoeuvres on the employers' part, though they would always bear the stamp of their origins. Workers took these forms and claimed them as their own as they filled them with a content of struggle. Despite the willingness of union leaders, the state was unable to wrest control of these organisations until after independence.

The collusion between the employers and the state in founding rural trade unions was bound to political concerns. By the end of the decade it was all too clear that agricultural workers were moving both towards organisation to defend themselves against the employers productionist drive and to advance their own demands for wages and improved conditions. There was an effort to insulate workers from political organisation by reducing their horizons to the sphere of 'industrial relations'. In contrast to the formation of the plantation unions where workers were already spontaneously adopting and building these organisations as their own, the General Agricultural Workers' Union [G.A.W.U.] was an undisputed creature of the Labour Department from the start. From the early fifties the Labour Department had been working gradually towards the founding of a general union for workers in mixed agriculture. There was a carefully orchestrated campaign both to enrol workers and solicit acceptance from European settlers. According to Furedi, the Senior Labour Officer in Rift Valley Province 'more or less created' the Union's leader Herman Oduor, 'handpicked' the rest of its leadership and instructed Oduor on how to manage a 'legitimate trade union'.<sup>46</sup> The Labour Commissioner, Ian Husband, subsequently met with settler leaders to 'ensure that the new union would be speedily recognised'.<sup>47</sup> There was all of a whirlwind and in July 1960 the union was duly recognised. By the end of the year the most reactionary farmers in Kenya were cast in the role of union treasurers as they collected the subs on behalf of union officials long before the 'check-off' system had been introduced. Even so, agricultural workers moved to adopt the union as their own and as independence approached began to initiate strikes. Very soon, the Nakuru District

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<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/17/Labour and Trade Unions [General]: O.J. Mason/Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Labour Officer/Thika, 24 December 1959.

<sup>46</sup> Confidential Interview conducted by Frank Furedi cited in *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* [London 1989], p.165.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p.165

Commissioner began to express regret that the establishment of the union 'was a help in some ways but a hindrance in others. Under the wise leadership of Mr Herman Oduor it helped to bring home some of the economic facts of life to the workers , but on the other hand it tended to make the workers believe it was a repository for all their complaints, both real and Imaginary.' <sup>48</sup>

The three plantation unions emerged almost simultaneously. All had 'identical' constitutions with that of the tea plantation workers acting as a model for its sister unions. From the outset the K.F.L. took a close interest and assigned Jesse Gachago as its plantation organiser to assist the fledglings. The headquarters of the newly formed coffee and sisal unions were established in Thika township where they shared the same office. In a tone of resignation, Labour Officer John Watts reported that 'employees in these industries will give considerable support to the Unions, and it is apparent that the Kikuyu is becoming increasingly conscious of the power that might be exercised through organised labour movements. Most employers accepted the growth of these unions as inevitable.'<sup>49</sup> The town was developing into a locus of union power with five branches encompassing the plantation unions, the Transport and Allied Workers' Union [T.A.W.U.], the Kenya Distributive and Commercial Workers' Union [K.D.C.W.U.] and the E.A.F.B.C.W., with the Tailors and Textile Workers Union [T.T.W.U.] taking its first pedestrian steps in the locality. Watts thought that many of the local union officials were of 'low calibre' but admitted that they had 'been extremely active in taking up alleged grievances of their members with the employers concerned.' Whilst official intervention was required to effect conciliation, in 'a large number of cases' there was also a tendency to sideline the Labour Office as 'in many letters to employers, when taking up alleged grievances, local officials incorrectly quote the labour laws in an attempt to strengthen their claim, in spite of being offered every advice and assistance by this office in the matter.'<sup>50</sup> How much does this reveal to us of the developing consciousness amongst these workers? At the very least a leap in understanding had occurred, since only months previously workers would have most often left issues to the Labour Office to attend on their behalf. As labour officers were increasingly perceived as partisan to the owners, workers moved away from their past inclinations to make representations through their adopted unions. So-called 'low calibre' union officials were designated as such because to some extent they were being swept along by the tide.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p.165

<sup>49</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/1: Thika Labour Office Annual Report, 1959.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/1: Thika Labour Office Annual Report, 1959.

The earliest battles of the plantation unions, prior to their registration and formal recognition, were fought over the right to organise and freedom of assembly. One of the first recruits to the C.P.W.U. was Njuguna Kinuthia who subsequently became the organisation's treasurer. He later told of how 'I joined the Union...' in the T.A.W.U. offices in Thika '...when the Coffee Union was not formed ...' and that, following the Union's formation, its officials 'were elected from the people who had joined the Union from the offices of the Transport and Allied Workers Union'.<sup>51</sup> They ran up against considerable obstacles 'as the administration were not prepared to give permission to hold open air meetings'<sup>52</sup> and there were no halls large enough for an indoor convention. Despite initial encouragement from the Labour Department, it was by this time beginning to distance itself and duly refused to assist the Union in the matter. A request by the C.P.W.U. to John Watts for a list of all coffee and sisal estates in the district confirmed the turnaround. This was refused on the grounds that only when the unions were registered would it 'be appropriate for an approach to be made'<sup>53</sup> to the coffee and sisal boards to obtain this information. Watts was later instructed by his superior that under 'no circumstances should it be provided to them by your office.'<sup>54</sup> The Labour Department was clearly at one with the local administration in an undeclared campaign to reduce the appeal of the Union by wearing down the resolve of prospective leaders and members.

This was affirmed in the K.F.L.'s request for the use of Thika Football Stadium for a mass meeting which was met with a 'blunt refusal' from Thika Urban District Council. The K.F.L. Plantation organiser, Jesse Gachago, anticipated a gathering of about 5,000 workers, of what was to be the inaugural meeting of the coffee and sisal unions but no hall in the township could possibly accommodate such a number. The Council implicitly discounted trade unionism, arguing that the stadium was solely for African 'welfare purposes'.<sup>55</sup> The District Commissioner cancelled the unions' other alternative by refusing to grant a licence to convene a public meeting in the 'open air'<sup>56</sup>, fearing that an uninvited audience would show itself. The meeting was eventually held at Kenya Cannery Hall, on November 22nd 1959. By disallowing the use of the stadium and restricting the union to an enclosed venue, the intention had been to reduce the size of the audience, so that what was to have

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<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: C.P.W.U. Annual Conference, 13-14th May 1961.

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Filenote by L.R. MacCullough, Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 27 October 1959.

<sup>53</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: J.Watts / Labour Officer/Thika to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 6 November 1959.

<sup>54</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: LR MacCullough / Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Labour Officer/Thika, 9 November 1959.

<sup>55</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: J.Gachago to Executive Officer/Thika Urban District Council, 2 November 1959.

<sup>56</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/C.P.W.U.1959-61: J.Gachago to District Commissioner/ Thika, 2 November 1959.

been a mass meeting became a much smaller affair with 'about' 400 persons inside the hall and 'approximately' 290 persons outside.

During the course of the meeting the aims and objects of the organisations relating to wages, pensions and improved working conditions were explained and there were appeals to the assembled workers to join up. Union constitutions were also read out. The speakers were Dave Barrett, Jesse Gachago and C.P.W.U. general secretary Godwin Wachira. Barrett referred to his experiences in Tanganyika where the sisal employers had recently recognised the union and a wage increase had been forthcoming. He pointed out that the plantation unions in Tanganyika had emerged 'in a very short time', that 60,000 workers had now enrolled and he expected similar developments in Kenya. He also referred to his visits to the Kericho Valley where whilst stiff opposition was apparent from the tea planters, 'most of the workers' were willing to join the Union. Gachago 'asked the audience if they had understood and if they agreed to join the Unions - they all replied that they were willing to join the Unions'. He went on to appeal 'to all persons' attending the meeting 'to recruit as many members as they could.' Entrance to the Union was set at 5/- a head and monthly subs were fixed at 1/- a month. The total amount of money collected was 'not disclosed to the writers of this report', as union officials 'said that this had nothing to do with the Labour Department.'<sup>57</sup> A further meeting was held on December 6th at the same venue with an attendance of 'between' 350-450 persons. By this time the coffee and sisal unions had been registered under the Trade Union Ordinance .

During the course of the next decade the trajectory of class formation took great strides as the plantation unions in their various permutations became the organised rural working class. Whilst its relative political illiteracy created fertile conditions for the proliferation of labour bureaucracy, the strikes of the sixties welded together the parts of the plantation proletariat into a class. This brought it into head on collision with the employers, the government and their own union leaders who were all working in various ways to impose fragmentation. The splits and factional rivalries that plagued the plantation unions reflected the contradictions of this process and expressed the problems of organised labour with its corrupt and malign leadership more than any essential divisions within itself.

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<sup>57</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Report of the meeting by labour and wages inspectors, Thika district, 23 November 1959.

## 5. *The Qualitative Leap Forward*

The Labour Department, badly bruised and partially paralysed, thought 1960 'was remarkable for its unprecedented number of trade disputes'.<sup>1</sup> During the course of the year trade union organisation sank deep roots amongst broad sections of workers. More than half of all strikes during the year occurred in agricultural undertakings, mostly on coffee estates in Central Province. These were initially, 'almost exclusively'<sup>2</sup> in Thika district. The East African Standard thought that 'part of the activity was due to the newness of the unions hence the tendency among members to use them on a 'new toy basis'.<sup>3</sup> Infantile pleasures aside, the recurrent spontaneity reflected the collective sensation of workers' at having found at last a form of organisation which enabled them to marshal their strength against the employers.

During the course of the year, 53 strikes occurred in Thika district and the same number in Kiambu.<sup>4</sup> In Thika, the months from January to April were the peak periods of strike action. During this period alone, the district was the site of 42 strikes involving 12,239 workers, as a result of which some 1,038, 245 hours were lost.<sup>5</sup> Whereas in 1959, just eight strikes had occurred in the district with the loss of 12,401 man hours, the initial eight disputes of 1960 incurred a loss of 48,847 hours. Notably, there were two major strikes during the course of the year at Kenya Cannery and E.A. Bag and Cordage, both processing factories situated in the heart of plantation country. Those estates which had parallel coffee and sisal estates seem to have been most vulnerable to concomitant strike action; Sisal Ltd, Kia Ora, Donyo Sabuk and Punda Milia estates were all afflicted by serious disputes. During May the epicentre of the strike movement shifted briefly to Kiambu. The district also occasioned a short general strike on the Limuru tea estates during September and in October, Kenyatta Day strikes engulfed parts of the area.

The casual and dispersed physiognomy of the workforce had given the Labour Department to presume quite wrongfully that plantation workers would never act in unison. The generalised nature of plantation stoppages was attributable to the integration of these workers into communities whose

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/98:L.D.A.R. 1960. Throughout Kenya, there were 232 officially reported strikes during the year, involving 72,545 workers and incurring a loss of nearly 758,000 man-days. See Appendix 7.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871/Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Telegram from the Acting Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State, 16 May 1960.

<sup>3</sup> E.A.S. 29 April 1960: 'Ministers to see Growers - Secret talks on strikes'.

<sup>4</sup> See appendices 10 and 11 giving details of coffee strikes and other disputes in Kiambu during , 1959-60.

<sup>5</sup> See appendices 8 and 9 giving details of coffee strikes and other disputes in Thika during , 1960-1.



ties remained despite the ruptures of the Emergency. These struggles now assumed unmanageable proportions and with a fearful spreading potential. No sooner did coffee workers in Thika and Ruiru return to work than their counterparts in the Kericho Valley entered the battlefield during September to engage on a mass scale with the tea plantation companies in 'the largest strike yet experienced in a single industry'. This lasted 19 days, involved 35,134 workers and sustained a staggering loss of 348,558 man-days.<sup>6</sup> Once again, workers combined their grievances over excessive tasks and strict discipline with 'an ambitious wage demand' which was eventually settled by an arbitration award. While less political than those in Central province, the strike firmly established the Tea Plantation Workers Union [T.P.W.U.] in an industry wide bargaining relationship with the Kenya Tea Growers Association. This established a pattern of struggle with shifting epicentres roughly alternating between Thika, Kiambu and the Kericho Valley, in all cases drawing in processing factories and pockets of industry.

The Labour Department believed that such a 'terrific spate of strikes' was due 'partly to the advent' of trade unionism and partly to the relaxation of Emergency restrictions, 'which served to give rise to a new spirit of militancy among workers'. There can be no doubt that the combativity of workers everywhere was aroused as the constraints of the Emergency were lifted. This mood was infused with political immediacy by the announcement of transition to African majority government in January. Taking stock of the upsurge, the department's officials thought 'the position was serious' and were in 'little doubt that political fever sweeping the country throughout the year had a deleterious effect on farm labour'.

It now seems true that many strikes contained powerful strains of retribution directed at headmen and nyaparas who had been collaborators and loyalists during the Emergency. The increasingly harsh nature of supervision compounded the depth of grievance against such men. This was of course bound up with the intense rates of exploitation the planters were attempting to impose in order to compete with their overseas rivals. Calls for their removal were bound to challenges for some control over the labour process itself, with workers in a few instances insisting on setting tasks themselves independently of the management. Significantly, wage claims and demands for the reduction of tasks and hours were advanced alongside this challenge. Many strikes were also

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<sup>6</sup> D.N.Hyde. 'Upsurge in the Kericho Valley: Tea Plantation Strikes 1959-66.' Unpublished S.O.A.S. monograph [1999]. Throughout the year, Kericho district, taking in the areas of Kericho, Nandi Hills and Sotik, was the location for principal sites of plantation struggle with 17 recorded disputes, including two general strikes. In contrast to the coffee employers in Central Province, the T.P.W.U. confronted more centralised adversaries, a handful of plantation companies which more or less monopolised the entire industry.

provoked by victimisations and demands for the reinstatement of sacked union activists. Early on, it was usual for grievances not to be stated at all. Towards the middle of the year, the general state of labour unrest on coffee estates 'had assumed serious proportions', evidenced by widespread 'go-slows' and 'wild cat' strikes which posed a direct threat to the coffee harvest.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of much agricultural unrest, 'the truculence of the workers and the apparent lack of any well defined cause of grievance'<sup>8</sup> created huge problems for attempts by the state to establish and apply procedures of conciliation. Negotiating and consultative machinery was hastily assembled or resuscitated in a desperate bid to arrest and defuse the spontaneous strike wave. Overall, the state was hardly able to absorb these shocks or keep abreast of the movement erupting beneath it. Even though by the end of the year there was 'a marked increase in joint negotiation and consultation in the agricultural and plantation industries', these were ever so fragile.<sup>9</sup> Given these problems, the Labour Department sought to encourage union officials to defuse the spontaneity of their members on its behalf. Although many employers suspected the C.P.W.U. for starting the strikes, its presence was often a help to them as, on many occasions, union officials were 'able and willing to secure a return to work by strikers.' Principal union leaders initially disclaimed responsibility for the strikes and thereafter partly disowned them by refusing to make them official. It now seems clear that despite this movement being largely beyond the control of union leaders, its spontaneity nonetheless promoted the C.P.W.U. and enabled its officials to eventually become brokers in negotiating the seasons picking rates with the K.C.G.A.

Uppermost in the mind of the Governor of Kenya, Sir Patrick Renison, were the political dimensions of the Thika strike wave, which he attributed to the 'unsettling excitement in present political atmosphere and unsatisfactory security position in the area, both impairing labour discipline'. Concerning him most were the 'reasons given for stoppages by strikers have not always been clear cut or sometimes even ascertainable'. In the absence of any structures of mediation involving union recognition, the state was virtually overwhelmed in the face of uncontrolled spontaneity. Without rights of access, union officials were unable to exercise a commanding influence over the rank and file providing a fertile ground for agitators to fill the breach. The government feared a faceless antagonist that would not let itself be known and refused to be dealt with in the traditional way. In some disputes the causes were unfathomable to labour officers, whilst

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<sup>7</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/98: L.D.A.R. 1960.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> By the end of 1960, throughout Kenyan industry as a whole, there were 104 negotiating bodies covering 187,000 workers.

an overlap of causation was identified as at the root of others. Conditions of service, usually pay or rations, were prominent amongst the demands raised by workers in 23 cases, whilst demands for the dismissal of a supervisor, 'usually a long service headman with loyal emergency record' came to the fore in at least half the plantation strikes that occurred. The struggle to reinstate dismissed union activists triggered at least 6 disputes and was a contributory cause in others.

Renison told the Secretary of State that 'it was noteworthy that majority of strikes occurred without prior discussion or negotiation with employers and that officers of the Ministry of Labour experienced quite exceptional difficulties when attempting conciliation'. Renison drew attention to the efforts of the Ministry to bring the K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U. to the negotiating table 'with promising results' in Thika where strikes were 'almost terminated...'. The Ministry quickly took the initiative to set up negotiations between employers and unions in the sisal and tea industries before these workers became embroiled in similar conflicts. Renison acknowledged his unease that the future position was 'still uncertain because of underlying difficulties...'<sup>10</sup> The government was unable to address the deep crisis on world commodity markets affecting Kenya's principal export. Fierce productivity drives and unbearable labour discipline which had plagued the labour process for several years lay at the source of the conflagration in contrast to faulty negotiating structures or the absence of conciliation stressed by government officials, employers and union leaders alike.

### *Plantation Struggles in Thika*

The events at Shortlands estate were important because they seemed to initiate the strike wave that coincided with both the announcement which brought an end to the Emergency on January 12th and the Lancaster House Conference that followed later that month. This marked the first occasion that a British Government had publicly declared its intention of handing over power to an African majority government. The arousal of expectations of land and jobs to follow had an inestimable impact. Whilst it is tempting to treat this coalescence as an accident, the colonial power's decision was made in full consciousness of the risks of collision with the awakening movement of the masses throughout Kenya.

Eighty-four Kikuyu coffee workers came out at Shortlands estate on January 2nd. The strikers included 49 men and 36 women including house staff, 'most' members of the C.P.W.U. At a baraza the workers complained that their headman, after hearing that they had joined the Union, warned

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<sup>10</sup>P.R.O./CO/822/2871 Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Telegram from the Acting Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State, 16 May 1960.

them against it and told them 'it was the same thing as joining Mau Mau', and then 'refused'<sup>11</sup> to issue their rations. A further allegation of victimisation related to another headman who was discharged 'because he was known to be a member of a trade union'.<sup>12</sup> The strikers had also voiced concern about the non-payment of an annual bonus. Almost immediately the local chief, Pithon Macharia, made his way to the estate and 'started interrogating the workers one by one' asking them questions about their grievances and membership of the Union. He then told them to go back to work 'irrespective of their grievances'. Sinister developments followed as Macharia 'installed a guard of Tribal Police as riot squad around the workers housing' on the estate. The K.F.L.'s plantation organiser Jesse Gachago protested to the District Commissioner at an 'unwarranted interference with workers affairs' by 'your chief'.<sup>13</sup>

Gachago offered his assistance in settling the dispute, though this was rejected by the manager on the grounds that the Union was not recognised by the coffee industry. The strikers stood firm and indicated to Thika's Labour Officer John Watts that they would return to work only after the manager had met with union representatives to investigate their problems. In an attempt to bypass the Union, Watts then supervised the election of workers representatives for a meeting with the manager and Colonel C.V. Merritt, 'a Visiting Agent for this estate' and Chairman of the C.B.K.'s labour committee. When the district's labour inspector arrived for the meeting at 'shortly after 2.30 p.m.'<sup>14</sup>, he 'found Mr J.M. Gachago delivering two bags of posho, one bag of potatoes, and a debe of cooking oil' to the strikers. Apparently the estate owner saw Gachago's car in the labour lines and approached him asking 'why he had visited the estate without permission....'<sup>15</sup>, to which Gachago apologised. There followed a brief exchange between Gachago and Merritt in which the latter underlined his position that whilst he was prepared to meet 'employees' representatives, he was 'not prepared to invite Mr Gachago to any discussions at present as the Union has not yet been officially recognised by the coffee industry.'<sup>16</sup> This was unacceptable to workers representatives' who refused to discuss anything unless Gachago was present. At a further meeting on January 12th workers were again told that the manager would only meet their representatives on the condition that they returned to work. Failing this, they were 'liable to be discharged.' Still the strikers did not show.

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<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/207: LD 98 Strike Reports, 1960.

<sup>12</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Jesse Gachago, 8 January 1960.

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/39/ K.F.L. 1959-63: Jesse Gachago to District Commissioner, 4 January 1960.

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24 C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 6 January 1960.

<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, January 1960.

<sup>16</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 6 January 1960.

Gachago's ambition to broker the dispute was undented as he asked Watts to arrange a meeting with Colonel Meritt which later took place at the Labour Office.<sup>17</sup> This was the Union's 'first contact' with an employers' representative, and the 'informal discussions'<sup>18</sup> which followed almost certainly influenced Thika's planters as they arranged to meet 'as result of the considerable increase in trade union activity in this district of late...'<sup>19</sup> On January 13th, their collective body, the 'Thika Area Labour Committee', with Colonel Merritt presiding, went into session. New wage rates for the coffee industry were discussed, but the Shortlands strike and the issue of Union recognition claimed the agenda. The delegates from Makuyu, Mitubiri, Donyo Sabuk, Ruiru and Kiambu together with representatives from the Labour Department were preoccupied by 'the situation brought about by the development of this Union.' The C.P.W.U. was believed to be taking up a 'large number' of grievances and to have a membership of 'about' <sup>20</sup> 1,700. Merritt reminded the assembled that only 30% of planters in the district had fully implemented the C.B.K.'s proposals for wages and conditions of employment published in July 1959, a situation which was fuelling the growth of the Union. The slackest areas were Donyo Sabuk and Makuyu. The meeting backed the Shortlands refusal to enter into any negotiations with the C.P.W.U. until it was recognised. The committee then agreed that workers 'could not be allowed to remain on the estate indefinitely' and recommended that the manager instruct the strikers 'to report first thing Friday morning for discharge' and offer to take back anyone 'electing to return to work', otherwise everybody else was 'to be off the estate by Monday morning.'<sup>21</sup> The committee advised that eviction orders be served on anyone refusing to comply. The question of Union recognition whilst not rejected out of hand, was to be drawn out by these gentlemen until they had recovered their strength sufficiently to dictate its terms. There was a general consensus that to make concessions during a period of instability would pose great dangers to themselves. The meeting finally agreed to form an employers association 'with the least possible delay'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61:Thika Labour Officer to Jesse Gachago, 8 January 1960.

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61:Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 14 January 1960.

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 14 January 1960.

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./ AF 1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, January 1960.

<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61:Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 14 January 1960.

<sup>22</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61:Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 26 January 1960.

The manager shortly addressed the strikers and instructed them to return to work 'at once' or he would 'have to assume that they no longer wished to work on the estate, and would be discharged accordingly' and given two days to leave. Not a single worker turned up, either for work or for their discharged, all remaining 'in their homes'. The manager then ordered them to 'get off'<sup>23</sup> the estate by January 17th. In a letter to the manager, Godwin Wachira, the Union's general secretary, 'regretted that such a thing should have happened ....'. Whilst pleading for discussions 'formal or informal' as 'a means of easing the tension', he made clear that the Union 'will not be responsible for any necessary action damned fit if the situation does not improve.' This was combined with backtracking as, according to Wachira, workers were willing to resume their duties 'provided your Headman is suspended' and that the estate committee 'sponsored by the Union will see that the necessary settlement could be reached.' In return for taking the line of least resistance, he asked the manager to consider giving Union officials 'unrestricted access into the workers homes, which happen to be on the estate, for easy consultation.'<sup>24</sup>

Once again workers refused to abide by this ultimatum and 'remained in their houses.' They were duly signed off but 'refused to come for their pay'. A whiff of strikebreaking filled the air as the 'Tribal Police' were again called to protect a headman, a clerk and ten fundis who had refused to join the strike, 'to prevent them being intimidated by the strikers'. The manager also made clear his intention 'to bring in some labour from outside, including some Kamba...'. The estate management subsequently took legal action to obtain their eviction in Thika's Resident Magistrate's Court, where a claim was entered against twelve of the eighty-four resident labourers. At the same time the manager had taken on 'about a dozen Kamba employees...'<sup>25</sup> to replace them. The strikers were summoned to court on January 25th when, at the request of the Union's advocate, the case was adjourned. Far from containing the struggle, the court action served to broaden it, as a 'crowd of people' from the estate marched through Thika township early that morning to their union's offices 'singing as a protest at the management's action.'<sup>26</sup> By this, they had taken their struggle out from the estate and into the town. The magistrate gave judgement on February 1st in favour of the plaintiffs with costs against the Union. Meanwhile the Union reported an 'official' dispute to the Labour Commissioner. The police arrived at the estate on February 6th to evict the workers but

<sup>23</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 16 January 1960.

<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: C.P.W.U. General Secretary to the Manager of Shortlands Estate, 15 January 1960.

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 23 January 1960.

<sup>26</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Labour Officer's Monthly Report, January 1960.

found they 'had removed themselves and no action was therefore necessary.'<sup>27</sup> Workers had opted to take their leave rather than place themselves at the mercy of the conciliator.

Though the Shortlands episode refused to be confined, during February there was a shortlived recession of the movement with fewer but more qualitative strikes. The events at Mongalia Estate give some insight into the social polarisation effected by the strike wave. The workers at this coffee estate, 'most'<sup>28</sup> union members, had come out on February 1st demanding the removal of a headman, a reduction in tasks and shorter working hours. Paradoxically, whilst the Union was quick to deny responsibility for calling the strike it was equally keen to claim credit for manoeuvring a return to work. It was not until February 8th that the manager called a baraza and made 'quite clear' his 'refusal' to reduce working hours as well as the size and standards of the 'Futi'<sup>29</sup>. He also refused to dismiss Lazarus Karanja, the headman workers wanted to be rid of. The strikers were then given an ultimatum to be back at work by 6 a.m. on Monday, February 15th or be sacked. Further pressure was put on them as the nearby Swani Estate, where many of the strikers children attended the estate school, requested the names of those workers failing to return on the grounds that as 'strikers are not workers, children of strikers will not be able to attend school...'.

A further dimension to the dispute was revealed when, according to John Watts, it became 'abundantly clear' that quite alot of people were 'redundant' and that the labour force could be 'considerably reduced.' Whilst denying any prospect of discharges as a result of the strike, the management prepared to pass these off as restructuring. Why did they hesitate to move in this direction? Serious fissures in the apparatus of control were exposed as eight headman took sides with the strikers. Watts reported the management's 'displeasure' at this breakdown and their inclination to dismiss the men. These desertions weakened the management and created much unease that divisions within authority would give more confidence to workers and make it difficult to impose a programme of redundancies without risking further upheaval. The Mongolia strike revealed a realignment of forces as a whole section of supposed 'loyalists' had gone over. Seeing the strength of the movement beneath them, these men now 'consider themselves as labourers as opposed to managerial staff '. At this juncture the management seemed too weak to isolate and sack them without provoking a another dispute. They were taken back on the understanding that they were to 'reprove' themselves 'by their application and honesty to their work in the future.' It seems

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<sup>27</sup>K.N.A./AF/1/9: Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1960.

<sup>28</sup>K.N.A./ABK 8/205: LD 98 Strike Returns, 1960.

<sup>29</sup>Task.

incredulous that having come so far, with the management on the run and its own lieutenants deserting it, the strikers should go back to work empty handed. A Union official subsequently informed the Labour Office that 'he had told these people to return to work.'<sup>30</sup> Workers were still measuring their union leaders and in these early days implicitly trusted them to resolve matters on their behalf.

Both the coffee and sisal divisions of the Sisal Ltd. Plantation in Makuyu were afflicted by a determined strike during the course of March and April in which 196,000 man hours were lost. Sisal cutters had articulated their demands in early March for increased wages, sick pay and their desire not to lose "free" siku for Sundays 'if absent one day'<sup>31</sup>. The manager promised to look into their complaints, prompting a return to work but nothing more was heard from the company. The dispute erupted again on March 23rd involving the entire labour force of some 800 workers, including domestic servants. The estate management refused Gachago permission to address the strikers on the grounds that the sisal industry had not yet recognised the Sisal Plantation Workers Union [S.P.W.U.].<sup>32</sup> He then reported the dispute under the Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance, but the Labour Commissioner declined to intervene on the grounds that 'the normal means of negotiation' had not been exhausted.<sup>33</sup>

After a week and with no sign of a return, the manager issued the strikers with a return or be sacked ultimatum. The strikers insisted that they would not go back unless Gachago was allowed to visit them on the estate. By April 5th, the strike had spread to the coffee division as 300 workers came out in 'sympathy' and with demands of their own for higher wages. The coffee strikers went back on April 8th only after having been 'instructed to do so by Mr Gachago'.<sup>34</sup> At this point 'employees representatives' presented the estate manager with an 'Agreement' which dictated their conditions for a return to work. They demanded that labourers working without rations should receive 160/- a month and that those receiving posho should get 125/- a month. Masons, carpenters, sisal cutters, stone cutters, workshop mechanics and machinists were all to receive 310/- per month with an annual increment of 10%. The agreement provided for a 45 hour week, gazetted holidays and

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<sup>30</sup>K.N.A. /AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1960.

<sup>31</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/222/ Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960, Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 8 March 1960.

<sup>32</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/222/ Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, Nyeri, 29/3/60.

<sup>33</sup>K.N.A./AF 1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, March 1960.

<sup>34</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/222/ Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 8 April 1960.



that 'Sundays will be treated as a holiday, and will not be normally worked.' Overtime was to be paid at time and a half and double time on gazetted holidays. Demands for leave were also forthcoming, 21 days every 12 months and 14 days sick entitlement on full pay. In contrast to past practice, workers also wanted work related injuries to be covered by the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance. This was a programme of mature demands that went beyond the bare minimum. Indeed, in virtually every dispute since January, Union officials had been urging workers to accept nothing at all as a precondition for recognition and to leave everything to them.

It is not known if Gachago had a role in drawing up these demands, only that he was working for an early return. That the "Agreement" was unconditional and confident in its tone suggests a large if not total input from an educated and experienced body of strikers which Labour Officer John Watts found 'rather enlightening in view of the fact that the S.P.W.U. has no officials in Thika at the present time.'<sup>35</sup> This took the K.F.L. by surprise and threatened to usurp its role. Like many employers in the district, the company was not ready to accept what the Labour Department knew to be urgent and essential if strike wave was to be wound down. That unless union officials were allowed access and recognition, and were dealt with through recognised negotiating channels, the spontaneous upsurge would overtake any belated mediation and present employers with demands far beyond the minimum.

The coffee workers came out again in sympathy on April 11th, though with their own demand for a 45 hour week. The management reissued their threat but this time there was no response. The dispute, now involving 1,100 workers, entered its fourth week with no sign of resolution. The company then decided, on the advice of the F.K.E., to dismiss all the strikers unless they reported for work on April 25th. There was a slight hesitation as the company awaited the outcome of a Union mass meeting at Makuyu Market 'to see what line Mr Gachago takes with regard to current Strikes'<sup>36</sup>, but the 'return or be sacked' ultimatum was rejected. Not a single body returned 'neither have the employees reported for their discharge'. The manager now moved to eviction as a magistrate's order was applied for under the Resident Labourers Ordinance for the removal of forty five workers each from the sisal and coffee divisions of the estate who were believed to be 'ring leaders'. The manager believed that, 'once these people are gone, the rest will then resume

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<sup>35</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/222: Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 8 April 1960.

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/222: Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960: Filenote by the Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 21 April 1960.

work.'<sup>37</sup>At the last hour, the K.F.L.'s Apollo Owiti met two company directors to negotiate permission to address strikers 'in an effort to obtain a return to work', but this was again denied. They were not ready to recognise officials who had yet to demonstrate their ability to enrol and control their members. Those workers threatened with eviction left the estate on April 30th, but far from enforcing submission 'all the employees have now said they wish to be discharged.'<sup>38</sup> A rump labour force resumed work on May 4th.

Workers at Kitimai Estate in Thika division had been restive since early March over the behaviour of the headman, Muhia Kague, for his 'brutal' and 'ruthless'<sup>39</sup> victimisation of trade unionists, and 'his outspokenly hostile attitude to the members of our union.'<sup>40</sup> Wachira demanded that this should cease 'forthwith' and requested the manager's 'intervention to protect these workers'.<sup>41</sup> Nothing was done and a 110 workers, 'many'<sup>42</sup> union members, stopped work on April 1st. The manager had 'informal discussions' with Gachago and promised an inquiry into the strikers demand for 'the removal of the Estate Headmen' and a wage increase, on the condition that they returned the next day. Though Gachago sent word for everyone to return on April 13th, the strikers 'did not believe that Mr Gachago had, in actual fact, told them to go back to work' and were still out when he and the labour inspector arrived for the inquiry the next morning. The strikers indignation and rejection of mediation was so intense that 'all...elected to be discharged, rather than to continue to work under the headman.'<sup>43</sup> The incredulity with which Gachago's 'instructions' were received marked the early onset of scepticism amongst workers towards their union officials.

Like permanent estate workers elsewhere, Kitimai labourers had half acre plots to produce vegetables. Civil proceedings were subsequently instituted by one of the sacked workers to obtain compensation for loss of his crops. According to the labour inspector the sacked worker was employed on a monthly contract and that 'in addition to the said contract' the employer, 'as part of his service', permitted the 'Plaintiff' to 'cultivate, sow and reap, vegetables on a portion of the defendant Company's Estate'. The worker alleged that the 'Defendant Company wrongfully

<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/222: Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 26 April 1960.

<sup>38</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/222: Strike at Sisal Ltd., Makuyu 1960: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 4 May 1960.

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Godwin Wachira to the Manager, Kitimai Estate, 2.3.60.

<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Godwin Wachira to the Manager, Kitimai Estate, 7.3.60.

<sup>41</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Godwin Wachira to the Manager, Kitimai Estate, 2.3.60.

<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/205: LD 98 Strike Returns, 1960.

<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 12 April 1960.

determined the contract for service' and evicted him from the estate with no right to harvest his crops. The proceedings were 'in the nature of a test case' <sup>44</sup> as this was a problem facing strikers throughout the district.

Relationships between workers and employers were 'deteriorating' everywhere, even on the Socfinaf plantations, reputedly the most 'enlightened' in the area. This outlook had influenced the company to grant the Union 'every facility'<sup>45</sup> to hold meetings on its estates during the previous two months. The general manager subsequently reported to the Labour Office that on two of the company's estates Union meetings had prompted 'a noticeable change in atmosphere'. Whereas before employees had 'appeared happy and cheerful, they are now disrespectful, "going slow", and demanding that they themselves should set the tasks in future.'<sup>46</sup> Here was a desire to control the labour process itself, a demand far ahead of the minimum programmes of trade unionism and evidence that an important section of coffee workers were maturing well beyond the raw spontaneity of January.

At the company's Ruera Estate in Ruiru 'most of the labour force', 'all' Union members, had been on a 'general' go slow since late March and there were rumours that a strike was imminent.<sup>47</sup> Then on April 15th, 400 of the estate's workers took part in the 'Good Friday Political Strike' in honour of Jomo Kenyatta. The following day the male weeding gang refused to do a set task of 150 trees, and proposed 'to set tasks themselves in future' without the management. They were shortly joined by the estate's women workers. The workers then demanded strip weeding tasks of just 80 trees and a reduction of womens' tasks from a 130 to 60 trees. The management retaliated by refusing to mark up their cards though rations continued to be issued.

By Monday April 18th, the weeding gangs seemed more determined to press ahead with their action and after completing half their task 'they sat down and refused to do anymore.' Once again the management refused to pay them. Meanwhile a gang of pruners who had completed their work satisfactorily refused to draw their rations 'out of sympathy' for the weeders. On Wednesday morning, the manager ordered 'all employees' to weed, and by 10.30 am 'they had all completed

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<sup>44</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, December 1960.

<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/225/ Strikes at Socfinaf Co., Ruera Estate and at G.Criticos & Co.Ltd., Kiaora estate, Ruiru: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 22 April 1960.

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1960.

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/225/ Strikes at Socfinaf Co., Ruera Estate and at G.Criticos & Co.Ltd., Kiaora Estate, Ruiru: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/ Central Province, 29 March 1960.

half a task and were sitting down in the field.' The Manager addressed them and heard the strikers complain that 'the work was too hard and the wages too small.' The manager maintained that conditions on the estate 'were as good as most, if not better' and that higher wages would eventually be the subject of negotiation between the K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U. Though the workers were 'in good temper', they were insistent in 'their demand for less work'. The Manager then warned them to return to work and complete their task as ordered, 'or else leave the estate and look for work elsewhere'.

Undaunted, almost the entire workforce came out on strike the following day with the added demand that they would only resume if three nyaparas and a field conductor were discharged, a request that was refused. By April 25th 'all the drivers' had joined the strike. After resisting attempts by their own Union to get them to go back, the strikers were visited by K.F.L. official Apollo Owiti who urged a return to work otherwise the Union 'would cease to support them.' The ultimatum was ignored and the Union stopped its issues of posho and beans that had been sustaining the strikers. By May 10th, the manager had discharged 42 'trouble makers' and advised Wachira to use his best 'influence to remove the discharged employees from the estate before any further talks could take place.' As a result all the strikers reported for work on May 12th, though the Manager refused to allow the 'bad hats' <sup>48</sup> to resume and 'instructed' them to report to the estate office to sign off and collect their outstanding wages. As they did so, 'many' other workers 'came to the office as well for signing off'.<sup>49</sup> They were ordered to complete their ticket before they could be paid up and returned to work the following day.

Glenlee estate in Ruiru, owned by M.E. de La Hayes, was one of the Theta Road coffee estates, the most concentrated coffee growing location in Ruiru, situated roughly midway between Nairobi and Thika. Ninety seven Kikuyu workers, all C.P.W.U. members, came out on April 7th with demands for the removal of the headmen and an increase in wages. The strikers refused to meet the management or return to work, 'stating that they would not consider doing so unless the three disputed headmen were removed.' At a baraza with the strikers, the labour officer advised them of their legal position, 'that they had broken their contracts and were liable to dismissal' and admonished that 'nobody could dictate to the management as to who should be engaged and discharged'. The estate manager then addressed the strikers and made reference to 'bad men who had

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<sup>48</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/205: LD 98 Reports, 1960.

<sup>49</sup>K.N.A./AF/1/9: Account of the course of the strike by the estate manager / Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

taken their money and shown them stupid ways'.<sup>50</sup> He then read out the names of eleven workers who were to be discharged and warned that anyone who had not returned to work by the following day would also be sacked. The strikers stood firm and insisted that if the workers were sacked they would 'all go'<sup>51</sup>, whereupon the baraza became festive 'amidst clapping and singing'.<sup>52</sup> In the event, the eleven 'troublemakers'<sup>53</sup> were sacked without pay as workers returned on April 15th. The lack of clear instructions from union officials may have confused the situation and compounded the intimidation workers may have felt at events on neighbouring Brook Estate, where another group of strikers had been evicted under section 4 of the Resident Labourer's Ordinance a few days earlier.

The minutes of the meeting which followed between de la Hayes and Wachira apart from leaving a priceless documentary of bootlicking, provide some insight into what employers and union leaders were thinking, and how they were interacting and manoeuvring during this delicate time. Hayes, who was reputedly arrogant, accused Wachira that 'labour relations were excellent before you came into the district... So much for the education of the workers.' Wachira then asked Hayes if he could 'address your workers and tell them to go back to work?' Hayes distrusted Wachira's co-operation, alleging that his workers wanted to go back 'but they are being intimidated and kept away from work by eleven of your members.' Wachira disclaimed responsibility for the strikes in the district which had 'not been called by the Union. These strikes are illegal.'

Hayes referred to an agreement between the F.K.E. and the K.F.L. whereby headmen, nyaparas and houseboys were to be excluded from union membership, though apparently the Union had enrolled some of them on the estate. The estate manager Wild then alleged that he had been told by the Union's office in Thika that there had been a 'meeting' and that 'it had now been agreed' that the Union 'could enrol anyone.' Hayes claimed that there had been 'no such meeting', and that Wild was told 'direct lie'. Wachira, drinking the cup of humiliation to the dregs, then agreed, 'If he said that, it is untrue, there has been no such meeting.' Hayes threatened Wachira that recognition would not be granted unless 'you go back and clean up your own office.'<sup>54</sup> Wachira, desperate to be treated as an equal partner, again agreed. He later told Wild that Hayes 'was very rude. I do not like to help

<sup>50</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/228/ Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from Labour Officer/Thika to M.E. de La Hayes, 12 October 1960.

<sup>51</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from Labour Officer/Thika to the Labour Commissioner 16 April 1960.

<sup>52</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from Labour Officer/Thika to M.E. de La Hayes, 12 October 1960.

<sup>53</sup>K.N.A./ABK/8/205/ L.D. 98 Reports, 1960.

<sup>54</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Transcript of Meeting between Hayes and Wachira related in a letter from Labour Officer/ Thika to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 21 April 1960.

employers who are rude and I cannot help employers who will not help the Union... Have I not stopped the strike on this shamba and everybody is going back to work tomorrow? Have I not told the eleven agitators to leave and they say they will leave peacefully?’

Hayes gave no leeway. Wachira was caught in a vice, between a determined body of strikers and an intransigent employer, but one that made him no less willing to find ways of acceding his members to Hayes’s demands. Wachira was momentarily indignant, ‘... but now Mr Hayes adopts a negative attitude to myself and to all his workers. He says they can all go. If he insists on this it is not good. He will get another labour force and they will all belong to the Union. The Union is here to stay. We have a world wide organisation. The next labour will strike and be discharged. OK! He will get another labour force and I will call them to strike. This will go on and on...’. His anger quickly subsided as he reassured Wild that the ‘eleven men have agreed to go peacefully and the others will start work tomorrow. I think I will go home now and leave it like this.’<sup>55</sup> A well earned respite, since he had played his part by purging the ‘agitators’ and manoeuvring a return to work.

The hardline of Hayes was not untypical of the hardpressed planters in the area. His anxieties were undoubtedly fed by a sense that the strikers were not entirely under Wachira’s control. Their disposition was unpredictable and no matter how much Wachira demonstrated accommodation, Hayes was unable to accept him as a bargaining partner. This attitude hardened after the workers returned, in response to ‘a noticeable “go-slow”... with many of them not completing their normal tasks within a day.’<sup>56</sup> According to the Union, workers had to work for three or four days before their tickets were marked up. Vindictive and on course towards a ‘lockout’, the management had allocated its workforce a task which, according to the Union, ‘no one could do’. The workers protested ‘against this brutal treatment’<sup>57</sup>, and on the morning of April 25th all but seven came out on strike again and departed for their union’s offices in Thika. It soon became clear that Hayes had manoeuvred them into a lockout by deliberately setting a task they could not complete. Though related to the initial sacking of eleven militants, yet another dispute had arisen. It seems that the workers had been provoked into strike action as a prelude to an attempt by Hayes to evict his workforce with no backpay on the grounds that they had broken their contract. He then met with Jesse Gachago ‘but no agreement was reached’. When Hayes rejected the strikers demand that the

<sup>55</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Conversation between Mr G.Wild, Manager of Glenlee Estate Ltd., and Godwin Wachira, 14 April 1960.

<sup>56</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 21 April 1960.

<sup>57</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from the C.P.W.U. to the Labour Commissioner, 22 June 1960.

headman be removed, they refused to continue working under him and 'elected to be discharged.'<sup>58</sup> The strikers could not go back on these terms and, in the absence of leadership from their union, decided to go. The opposites were irreconcilable.

The veils of contract, a red rag to a union official, were almost certainly drawn in calculated fashion by Hayes like much else in this dispute. Wachira took the bait and pleaded the Labour Commissioner's intervention as arbiter, on the grounds that 'the two parties cannot prove who broke the contract'. His aim was not to recover workers their jobs but to plead for their meagre backpay and unharvested crops. Indicating the pressure he was under a rhetorical 'threat' was issued, that if the management did not yield 'the Union is fully decided to take any action it deems necessary directed to this particular Estate if not all'.<sup>59</sup> The Union was taking the least line of resistance, accepting job losses and demanding less than the bare minimum for those remaining. Here was an indication that union leaders would be willing subordinates on the plantations in the years ahead, if the employers allowed them to be. Other employers, mechanising and seeking to shed labour, were also preparing to go down this road, sacking workers without pay, then releasing this on union intervention, all in the knowledge that this would give the appearance of union partisanship, of 'doing its best under the circumstances' for its members.<sup>60</sup> Wachira accepted the 'accomplished fact' that the workers had been sacked and that all the Union could do was to recover their back pay. Having colluded in the sacking of eleven militants and in disarming workers in the face of a planned provocation, his recourse was towards 'impartial' state intervention. He hoped the Labour Commissioner would act on his behalf and save the union leadership from strike action. This typically illustrated the outlook of union officials and the stand they would take on most issues in the period ahead.

Wachira was for dragging out this dispute, to give credence to the appearance of insoluble difficulty, in order to justify intervention from the Labour Commissioner. He left the issue unattended for some time before contacting the K.C.G.A. in June. His approach was now starkly non-partisan, believing that it would now 'be of no use for either the management or the workers to judge who was right and or wrong.' He urged both sides 'reach agreement in good time' or seek government intervention for an 'impartial inquiry' from which a report would follow showing

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<sup>58</sup>K.N.A./ ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/ Central Province, 26 April 1960.

<sup>59</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/228: Glenlee Estate, Ruiru Strikes: Letter from the C.P.W.U. to the Labour Commissioner, 22 June 1960.

<sup>60</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Wachira to the Labour Commissioner, 22 June 1960.

whether legislation could be directed 'to remedy any faults disclosed by such inquiry.' He promoted this outcome in the hope that Glenlee would become a test case and force a way for mediation of the strike wave generally. Glenlee could be the site of a resolution, however problematic, that could then be turned to the advantage of the would be mediators. Wachira's turn to the K.C.G.A. was in the hope that its collective discipline would bring the recalcitrant to heel. Once recognition and access for union officials were granted, his hopes were pinned on collaboration with the K.C.G.A. 'to remove obstacle like this'. Along this road the Union could prove its indispensability to the employers as both sides applied themselves 'to promote industrial harmony, efficiency and as contributors to the National Well Being.' <sup>61</sup>

It took until the beginning of July for the Labour Commissioner to complete his enquiries. Embracing the appearances created by the management, he came down firmly on the side of de la Hayes. 'It would appear that they left their jobs and thereby broke their contracts.' He then cleared de la Hayes of all legal obligations for backpay or compensation to workers for the loss of their crops, 'nor to allow the continued tending and harvesting of such crops.' <sup>62</sup> The Labour Department had now abandoned all pretence of its distance from bad employers as it moved openly to defend 'capital as a whole'.

### *The Strike Movement and the Rise of the C.P.W.U.*

During the course of March the strike wave reached a new peak, with twelve disputes officially reported involving 3,563 workers and a loss of 106,691 man hours. The movement spread beyond Thika division and into Ruiru where most of the strikes were concentrated taking in coffee, sisal, pineapples, mixed farming and textile manufacturing. Some of these disputes may have been fuelled by the disappointment of 'many Kikuyu' returning to the area after "goodwill visits"<sup>63</sup> to former employers in the Rift Valley who were unable or unwilling to take them back. In April, the strike movement ascended to its highest point, surpassing the January explosion and negating entirely the February trough. Overall there were 22 reported strikes throughout the district with their epicentre, as in March, located in Ruiru. In sixteen of these workers were ushered back to work by their union officials in all cases empty-handed and with only a promise that their grievances would then be looked into. In seven disputes, workers decided that faced with going back to work on these terms, it was

<sup>61</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Letter from Godwin Wachira to the Executive Officer, K.C.G.A., 9 June 1960.

<sup>62</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959 - 61: Letter from R.A.J.Damerell, Labour Commissioner to the General Secretary, C.P.W.U., 1 July 1960.

<sup>63</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9:Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, March 1960.



not worth returning at all. Sympathy strikes were also in evidence on those plantations with sisal and coffee divisions. The number of estates effected by the 'Good Friday Political Strike' was 'as high a figure as 50%', with petrol stations and bus services also affected by the stoppage. On estates where workers had been sacked as a result of a strike, 'the employer has found considerable difficulty in building up a new labour force'. Significantly, whilst there was 'plenty of labour in the district looking for work', some estates 'appear to be blacklisted'.<sup>64</sup>

The Labour Department was caught unprepared due to an unexpectedly large number of strikes which 'put considerable strain'<sup>65</sup> on Thika's Labour Office. Industrial relations work continued unabated as routine inspections and field work fell by the wayside. Labour officers hastened back and forth to the offices of the K.C.G.A. and the F.K.E. in Nairobi for discussions with its leading executives. John Watts later reported 'a most hectic month, the telephone has hardly stopped ringing, and at times the office has resembled a railway station with numbers of people waiting to get in to see the writer.'<sup>66</sup> There was a pattern of delay in the notification of disputes to the Labour Office, to late for it to do anything but offer formal conciliation. The policy of the Labour Department was to encourage disputes to be reported as a matter of urgency and then settled as soon as they arose. The quicker that individual disputes were identified, the more easily wider movements of workers could be fragmented. The department was anxious that its field officers take control of disputes to prevent escalation. The highest priority was attached to arresting movements in the making before they could take on an identity of their own. The Labour Department's strategy was to monitor and take control of the part in order to defuse the whole that was developing.

Overall, these strikes revealed an emergent social being as determined bodies of workers forged an identity for themselves that became inextricably bound to trade unionism. There was an unrelenting collective sense of strength and confidence in facing the employers. In Nairobi, the Labour Commissioner, W.R.C. Keeler, and his deputy, Ian Husband, were deeply concerned at this phenomenon. They were puzzled by the absence of pay demands and uneasy at the peculiar nature of these strikes expressed in the evident determination of the strikers to risk their jobs in a struggle for union rights. They were also acutely aware of the political context of the disputes and their spreading potential during a volatile transitional period of decolonization.<sup>67</sup> Even more alarming was that whilst

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<sup>64</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1960.

<sup>65</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, January 1960.

<sup>66</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>67</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U.1959-61: J.Watts, Filenote, 19 January 1960.

during the initial strikes workers tended to follow the instructions and advice of their officials, subsequent struggles revealed a growing scepticism and impatience with the role of union leaders.

The Labour Commissioner met leading groups of farmers in Thika, Mitubiri and Ruiru for 'informal discussions on the present labour situation in the district', whilst the Senior Labour Officer in Central Province, O.J. Mason, attended a Ruiru District Association meeting on April 14th called to discuss 'the prevailing situation regarding strikes, and security, in the district.' The meeting focused on the 'anxiety and distress' that 'was mounting in the district'. It resolved to call an emergency meeting of coffee and sisal growers 'immediately' with representatives of the local administration and the government in attendance, at which the districts 'anxiety be stressed to persons at the highest level of Government'. This took place at the Ruiru Club on May 2nd and its importance can be gauged by those in attendance. Apart from Mason, the Chief Secretary, the Ministers of Labour and Defence, the Labour Commissioner, the Provincial Commissioner, District Commissioners and labour officers from Thika and Kiambu, and administration staff from Ruiru, Gatundu, Githunguri and Kiambu were all in attendance. Committee members from the district associations of Thika, Makuyu, Donyo Sabuk, Kiambu and Limuru were also there. A force was gathering in response to the rising tide of labour protest and action.

Around sixty committee members of growers associations representing an area worth £14,000,000 in crops and livestock told ministers and officials of their 'concern over the flood of strikes' which had hit the area. The meeting 'deliberated alot' and agreed on a 'round-table' conference as the 'best way' to handle the crisis. It was agreed to issue a threat to African workers 'of the consequences' of their 'failure' to pick the coffee crop and that 'they should be told preferably by the government of the large amount of revenue the country would lose' which would result in less money to spend 'on education and other schemes designed to improve the African way of life'. This was a plea to the government to retaliate by withdrawing the resources and services upon which African communities depended. The meeting was quick to dispel any suggestion that the government should intervene in 'any other way' <sup>68</sup>, a sign that coercion may have been considered. An eight man committee was then elected to conduct discussions with government departments on 'how to deal with labour unrest which was threatening to disrupt their industries.'

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<sup>68</sup> E.A.S. 5 April, 1960: 'Growers and Ministers discuss strike wave...'

The symbiotic ties between estate owners and their state machine were becoming more transparent. A 'scabbing' operation on the large scale organised during the rail strike seemed impossible, given that no European or Asian would or could do such work. How could a cowed labour force of Africans be dragooned amidst such a prevailing mood of stubbornness? A further consideration related to the use of naked coercion to force labourers to pick coffee. After 'considerable discussion' the assembled parties resolved that a 'small committee' should meet the Chief Secretary later in the week 'to discuss matters further.'<sup>69</sup> Threatened and fearful, these forces were preparing to rise to the occasion. There was extreme tension amongst employers in face of the escalation of class struggle throughout the province. The reaction of the estate owners was to close ranks and call on the state to abandon its posture of neutrality and place its machinery at their disposal. What is certain is that without the coercive teeth of the state apparatus the organised landowners were essentially powerless.

Whilst these forces were of a mind to lash out, the Government preferred mediation. Along the former path, given the generalised restiveness of workers throughout industry, there was a risk of provoking a general strike under conditions where the state was far from prepared. This had been a recent danger during the rail strike when the K.F.L. had threatened to mobilise its affiliates in support of the railwaymen. What settler planters could not grasp was the coincidence of strikes and union organisation, and the contradictions within the unions themselves. It had generally appeared as if union officials were behind the strikes though, with few exceptions, they were unwilling passengers of the upsurge and worked to channel spontaneous energies into demands for recognition and access for themselves to assist in arresting the movement they had joined. The Labour Department was entirely conscious of this duality which it had worked to create over a long period; its agenda was to assist this layer to bring the strike movement under control.

During the course of February the C.P.W.U. was 'the most active' of the unions operating in the district. Union branch offices now existed in Thika township and Ruiru with others planned in Makuyu, Donyo Sabuk, Kiambu and Nyeri 'in the near future.' It held a public meeting on February 14th with recognition, strikes and victimisations featuring high on the agenda. The labour officer was reassured when he heard Gachago, Wachira and James Karebe from the K.L.G.W.U. 'It is pleasant to be able to record that the speakers all adopted a more responsible attitude than has been recently shown at such meetings and were at pains to point out that strikes should only take place when all other constitutional means had first been tried in an attempt to obtaining a peaceful solution.' In an

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<sup>69</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

important breakthrough, Gachago and Wachira met with the general manager of Socfinaf, Kenya's largest<sup>70</sup> coffee plantation employer, who 'agreed to allow union officials to hold meetings on the company's estates.' This came in the wake of moves by employers representatives to formally establish themselves as the K.C.G.A which 'made rapid strides during the month.'<sup>71</sup> This was calculated to strengthen their hand in granting forms of recognition and access on their terms. The C.B.K. subsequently warned union leaders that the K.C.G.A. was 'unlikely to treat with a trade union which allows its members to strike even before a grievance has been voiced, let alone discussed with the management'.<sup>72</sup>

The C.P.W.U. continued with its recruitment campaign with 'considerable numbers' enrolling. A mass meeting of the Union was held at Ruiru Stadium on Sunday March 20th, attended 'by about' 3,000 workers. The principal speakers were Gachago and Mboya. In a 'leave it to us' appeal Gachago urged the audience to join their appropriate unions, so that better terms and conditions of employment could 'be fought for them by their union leaders'. He indicated to the crowd that the union now had 7,000 members. Gachago replied to accusations by 'some Government officials' that workers' subscriptions had 'been lavishly spent by the union officials', condemning this as 'purely absurd' since the Government had officially registered the Union. Mboya then sounded a note of deference to the Registrar in full knowledge that members of the Labour Department were present. Lending credence to the accusations of union corruption, he warned workers to ensure that they got proper receipts for the money they paid to the Union, and urged collectors to work 'hard and honestly' for their fellow members. He also called on workers to pay their subscriptions regularly instead of spending their money 'on buying beer or Tusker'.<sup>73</sup>

During April, Thika's labour officer again reported 'a considerable amount' of trade union activity in the area, especially by the C.P.W.U.<sup>74</sup> A new branch was formed in Kiambu and workers came forward to join at an 'astonishing rate'. According to the Labour Office, few workers 'had any idea' of the functions of a trade union, 'they thought' that by paying their subscriptions 'their future was assured when the day of "freedom" arrived'.<sup>75</sup> Other unions were also taking a hold around the

<sup>70</sup>The company ran twelve estates spread out over 5,400 acres and employed 2,500 permanent workers.

<sup>71</sup> In response to the spread of trade unionism on the plantations, the owners flocked into the K.C.G.A. During the course of July the organisation swelled from 170 members representing some 28,500 acres of coffee to 249 farming an acreage of 39,251 out of a total of 50,700 acres under coffee plantings.

<sup>72</sup> C.B.K. *Kenya Coffee Monthly Bulletin*, April 1960.

<sup>73</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Joint Report Thika Labour and Wages Inspectors to the Labour Office, 21 March 1960.

<sup>74</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1960.

<sup>75</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/50: Central Province Senior Labour Officer's Quarterly Report, April 1960.

district. The Domestic and Hotel Workers Union [D.H.W.U.] and the T.T.W.U. were 'extremely active' during March, both organising public meetings during the course of the month. Riding the strike wave, the textile union was able to seal a recognition agreement with East African Bag and Cordage. The T.A.W.U., the Timber and Furniture Workers Union and the E.A.F.B.C.W. were also active in recruitment and establishing branches in the area during the early part of the year. The K.D.C.W.U. had held meetings with Kenya Canners and with the Kenya Tanning Extract Company over recognition. The K.F.L. gave approval to the formation of Thika Trades Council and was assisting to draw up its constitution. During the course of May and June, the K.L.G.W.U. and the Kenya Civil Servants Union also held meetings in the area concerning recruitment, negotiating structures and proposals for terms and conditions of employment.<sup>76</sup> In July, 25 local officials attended a weekend school organised by the K.F.L. led by Clement Lubembe. The labour officer reported his perceptions of how 'a certain amount of concern is felt in this district over the way Trade Unionism is developing, and the opinion has been expressed that in some cases it is neither 'healthy' nor 'responsible', but is merely being geared to use for political purposes.'<sup>77</sup> Here were new developments coming from within old forms and in simultaneous conflict with them. The hard, frustrating and mostly localised struggles of the past were paying off in a collective leap forward where urban and rural proletariats were inspiring and propelling each other forward.

According to O.J.Mason, the Thika strike wave 'reflected the prevailing cockiness' of workers in the province, 'an attitude which became noticeable' shortly after the Emergency was ended in January and that 'recent happenings in the African political field' had encouraged even greater boldness. He described the mood of the strikers as 'morose, unhelpful and often insolent', a demeanour 'reminiscent of the early years of the Emergency, and they treated visiting departmental officers, both Europeans and Africans with contempt. In some cases workers with long service assumed a fatalistic "do what you like with me" attitude which again reminded people of the uneasy days of 1952...'. Significantly, many of these workers, who in some cases 'had no homes to go to', were prepared to be signed off rather than give way. This was a remarkable resolve given the circumstances of a labour surplus in the district. The components of this mood shed some light on the rarity with which representations were made to management before disputes occurred.

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<sup>76</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>77</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, January 1960.

Mason held that 'there was seldom evidence that the stoppages were instigated by a union,' indicating that they were mostly spontaneous actions initiated by workers themselves who then embraced the Union as their own organisation of struggle. These raw recruits met a labour bureaucracy coming from the opposite direction, attempting to adopt them into 'unions' they were fashioning as agencies of reconciliation to the employers and usually on their terms. Given the absence of official leadership or sanction to struggles, which often took union leaders themselves by surprise, it is important to note Mason's observation that the strikers demands frequently followed a set pattern, suggesting that 'there was often cohesive organisation of the stoppages.'<sup>78</sup> Union organisation served to formalise the strength of already existent informal networks cast during the Emergency. Herein lay the most acute contradiction of the period between a syndicalist variant of unionism based upon the spontaneity of workers struggles and bureaucratised forms of unionism sponsored and imposed by the Labour Department. These opposites were almost continuous conflict.

The C.B.K. believed it 'hardly a coincidence' that 'within a matter of days' of the Union opening its offices in Thika 'the labour on several estates came out on strike although the Union officer denied that any strike had been called'. In fact workers had initiated the strike movement well before they had even joined the union and its offices had opened. Once enrolled, the union apparatus worked overtime to restrain and arrest the spontaneity of the movement entering its ranks. The C.B.K. referred disparagingly to 'the present level of education', that is the consciousness, 'of many coffee labourers' to whom 'union membership and strike action are synonymous terms'.<sup>79</sup> This was entirely true, though what the inverted logic of the employers presented as backward, in effect represented a great leap forward. Nonetheless, whilst workers had rightly claimed the union as their own, there was as yet no comprehension of its designated role as a 'responsible' agent and apparatus of control.

The C.P.W.U. leaders believed they could achieve recognition by demonstrating their willingness to wind down these strikes, through demobilising their members and thus proving their indispensability to the employers. Given the pressure they were under, they were in some instances prepared to risk a controlled mobilisation of raw recruits, unschooled in procedure and impatient for gains, to obtain recognition from the more intransigent and bigoted employers. On many occasions the intent of the Labour Department to impose the semblance of unionism led by 'class collaborators' foundered as workers adopted these forms as their own and filled them with a content of struggle. The agenda for using the C.P.W.U. as a vehicle for defusing strikes was then seriously jeopardised.

<sup>78</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/50: Senior Labour Officer's Monthly Report /Central Province, March 1960.

<sup>79</sup> C.B.K. 'Kenya Coffee' Monthly Bulletin, April 1960.

Many employers had expressed 'grave concern' over the way the plantation unions 'appear to be developing in this area', and were convinced that 'they are more political than anything else.'<sup>80</sup> In the midst of the early Thika strike wave 'opinion hardened to the theory that the unrest', whilst projected through the C.P.W.U., 'had been fostered for political motives'. The question was by whom? This 'was one of a number of imponderables interwoven in the situation, which exercised many minds.' Walter Coutts, the Chief Secretary for Kenya, grinded his teeth at 'intimidation of labour' in the coffee districts. and threatened a 'very special exercise' by the Minister of Defence to find out 'who was doing the intimidating and why'. Addressing the Legislative Assembly, he described this intimidation as 'a grave difficulty' and accused a group of people out 'for their own ends' of 'bringing others out on strike who had no idea what they were striking about.' To the police informed mind it 'appeared that labour was being wantonly led astray.' Their restlessness could only have been stirred by outside 'agitators' or 'extremists.'<sup>81</sup> More soberly, Mason drew attention to the 'reckless underhand activities of some of the movement's lesser personalities'.<sup>82</sup>

Some focus on these issues was provided by Thika's wages inspector who was despatched to oversee 'barazas' throughout the district. He addressed strikers on various farms, where he 'noticed that the crux of the strikes was mixed up with some political elements. In most cases, youngsters were the spokesmen of the strikers, whose ideas were of a political nature and not of plain Trade Unionism'. He also reported that the Union had enrolled 'very many members' all over the district, 'who apparently join without knowing the aims and objects of the Union'.<sup>83</sup> New layers of young workers, unintimidated by the repressive ghosts of the recent past, seem to have been both in the forefront of the recruitment campaign and predominant amongst the new recruits. Hence we can begin to understand why union officials were so keen to contain the hotheads who kept up the pressure on them by actually building the union. Here was an unofficial cadre which threatened to bypass, if not usurp the authority of the union bureaucracy. The deference shown by union leaders towards the employers was an anathema to new layers of youth coming into struggle. The vitality and freshness of this new generation was untainted by the defeats of the past and injected a new energy into the anti-colonial struggle.

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<sup>80</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1960.

<sup>81</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871/ Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Reuters News Agency Report, 11 May 1960.

<sup>82</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/50: Central Province Senior Labour Officer's Monthly Report, April 1960.

<sup>83</sup> K.N.A./AF 1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Reports, April 1960.

Sir Patrick Renison later told the Secretary of State that farmers were 'of the opinion that there is a recrudescence of Mau-Mau, and that union officials who recently have been organising plantation labour are ex Mau Mau'. In the search for a conspiracy however, none could be found. Mboya told Renison that 'irresponsible agitators have taken charge' because the employers had denied union officials access to their estates to visit union members.<sup>84</sup> This was a calculated warning of the type that Mboya had made many times in the past: if the employers continued to deny union officials access to the workplace, union leaders would lose control and the militants would take over. Indeed, there were not a few former Mau Mau amongst the union agitators. This was, however, a negation of the insurgency. For, during the latter period plantation workers and their communities had been largely sympathisers or auxiliaries of small active contingents of fighters. During the strike wave this position was transformed into its opposite, as large numbers of workers organised themselves into an active force in their own right. Even so, the invisibility of rank and file agitators was a recurrent concern. A movement involving such large numbers of workers made it difficult to identify just who the 'ringleaders' were, though the wide extent of their role is indubitable. They operated, as Furedi has argued of Mau Mau, in an organisation based on 'a network of informal ties rather than on an formal system'.<sup>85</sup> This movement had a life of its own apart from the union bureaucracy grafted onto it.

Whilst the seeds of scepticism were germinating, a feature of the strike wave was a faith in the brokering capacities of union officials who led most strikers back to work empty handed. The C.B.K. observed that 'the strikers gained nothing from the skirmish'<sup>86</sup>, since in most cases they had either gone back with no material gains or decided never to return. To a large extent workers were consciously using these strikes as a testing ground where they 'were unwilling to put forward any reasons for their action and referred the estate management's to the Union representative - who had apparently called no strike'. Union officials were being put into the ring, often against their will. How would they handle the employer? What gains could they extract, now and in future? These questions were uppermost in the minds of many strikers. What needs to be emphasised is that these were clashes in which both sides were intent on getting the measure of each other and of those in between.

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<sup>84</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871/ Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Telegram from the Acting Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State, 3 May 1960.

<sup>85</sup> Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* [London, 1989], p.140.

<sup>86</sup> C.B.K. *Kenya Coffee Monthly Bulletin*, April 1960.



That the situation was at least temporarily restored, was due in no small part to the efforts of K.F.L. officials Jesse Gachago and Apollo Owiti along with C.P.W.U. general secretary Godwin Wachira. Whilst Gachago was away in Casablanca, Owiti was delegated by the K.F.L. to take his place as its plantation organiser, and became 'instrumental in obtaining a resumption of work' on the estates. John Watts believed the ebb tide of the strike movement was 'mainly due to the efforts' of Owiti who apparently 'showed considerable concern over what he described as irresponsible striking in the district and immediately embarked upon a campaign of visits to all places where strikes were in progress telling the strikers to resume work immediately'.<sup>87</sup> Upon Gachago's return Owiti was manoeuvred into position as general secretary of the newly formed S.P.W.U. Overall, the complicity of the C.P.W.U. in the strikes was 'vigorously denied' by its leadership which worked hard to bring them to a conclusion. Both Gachago and Wachira made no secret that 'it was their earnest wish the strikes should finish'. There seems no reason to doubt this bearing in mind their pains to continually impress on union members that strike action was secondary to all 'constitutional' means of resolution, 'a position few strikers could understand'<sup>88</sup> especially since, in the absence of union recognition and access, there were no constitutional arrangements. As the picking season approached these issues became paramount.

The Minister for Labour, Richard Luyt urged that it was the duty of 'top trade unionists' in Kenya 'to brief their members on the underlying principles of trade unionism and implore upon them a strict coherence of the same.' As to the K.F.L., its leaders were unable to give primacy to the source of this conflict which lay in the precarious fortunes of Kenyan planters in face of the vicissitudes of the world market, compelling many of them to turn on their workers. For K.F.L. general secretary Tom Mboya, the plantation strikes were an 'indication of a flaw in industrial relations' which could only be corrected if both sides of the industry 'play the game according to the rules'<sup>89</sup>, a position which precluded unconditional support for the strikers. In almost every strike during the early part of the year workers had refused to 'play the game'. Nonetheless, union officials by and large played this for them as they colluded with labour officers and employers to manoeuvre a return to work as a precondition for negotiations.

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<sup>87</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>88</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/50: Central Province Senior Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1960.

<sup>89</sup> E.A.S. 7 May, 1960: 'Politics and organisation to blame: causes of wildcat strikes explained.'

## 6. *The Contradictions of Conciliation*

### *Pay, Recognition and Access*

The annual meeting of coffee planters, administrative officers and chiefs to 'agree' the season's picking rate took place on March 31st at the peak of the early strike wave. They decided to fix the rate as it was in the previous year, whilst acknowledging that the C.P.W.U. 'may wish to have its say in the matter as well.'<sup>1</sup> In view of the upsurge and with the picking season upon them, the employers were forced to relent somewhat and bring the union bureaucracy into the picture to impose the agreement. While both parties were preoccupied with harvesting the coffee crop, during the course of several meetings union recognition, works councils and 'rules of access to estates' were raised. A precondition on all these accounts was that the Union capitulate and leave picking rates where they were in return for what transpired as inferior terms of recognition and access. Thereafter, the employers 'support' for the Union became conditional on bureaucratic control of the membership.

The formula agreed on May 6th between the C.P.W.U. and the K.C.G.A. was that the picking task for the new season would be set at a minimum of two debes per daily ticket, fixed at the rate of 60 cents per debe plus rations, much less than an earlier claim submitted by the Union. The agreement outlined a 8 hour day based on a 47 hour week, commencing at 7a.m. since 'the labourers best work is done in the early morning'.<sup>2</sup> Wachira moved to conceal the leadership's capitulation by peddling an increment of 12/- for those workers able to pick two extra debes on top of an ordinary ticket. The K.C.G.A. urged its members to "unbend to some extent" over the access of union officials to their estates "to allow their labour to be informed of the arrangement arrived at." In the absence of legal sanction, the dissemination and policing of the agreement's provisions by K.F.L. and coffee union officials was crucial to its success and they duly gave the employers assurance that they would use their influence to avoid disruption and ensure a 'normal turnout' for the picking period.<sup>3</sup> Very shortly the members were to have their say in the matter as union officials were forced to restate their claim for a substantial increase.

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<sup>1</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, March 1960.

<sup>2</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/8: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>3</sup> E.A.S. 9 May 1960: 'Agreement in coffee industry'.

The 1960 season was an 'unusual one'. Normally, picking began in Donyo Sabuk and Makuyu, moved down through Mitubiri and Thika, and finished up in Ruiru. In 1960, the 'flush' was almost simultaneous throughout the whole district. Such an extraordinary situation posed intractable problems for labour recruitment, compounded by the refusal of prospective pickers to sell their labour power at a price dictated by the employers. The generalised 'flush' strengthened workers' bargaining power, and they knew it. During March and April, estates in Mitubiri, Makuyu and Donyo Sabuk experienced serious problems in procuring women casuals from the reserves for weeding and picking tasks.

By the end of May, picking was taking place in only 'parts' of Makuyu, Donyo Sabuk and Ruiru with a 'certain amount' going on in Mitubiri and Thika, though this was carried out with 'mainly' resident labour. On May 6th, the manager of Matungulu Estate in Donyo Sabuk telephoned the Labour Office to report that he was not only 'experiencing difficulty' in obtaining pickers from the nearby Kamba reserve but that his resident labourers were not doing 'their normal daily task.' Apparently news was spreading throughout the reserve 'that nobody should pick coffee'<sup>4</sup> at the rate of 60 cents per debe.<sup>5</sup> A mass meeting followed at Matheni market in Ukambani on May 12th, addressed by union officials, together with representatives from the Labour Department and the district administration. The objective<sup>6</sup> was to persuade workers to turn out and pick the crop with the promise of negotiations on a new picking rate. Apparently the baraza was instrumental in restoring the situation throughout Donyo Sabuk 'back to normal'<sup>7</sup> as the pickers then duly trekked to the estates and started work.

Any expectations of a knock-on throughout the district were dispelled when further difficulties arose over labour recruitment in Ruiru later on in the month. Two major estates in the area, Tatu and Mchana owned by Socfinaf Company Ltd., were unable to obtain labour from the Githunguri location of the Kiambu reserve as Union members had organised to prevent pickers from showing up. Wachira addressed them in an attempt to get them to call off their actions but got 'a rough

<sup>4</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, April 1960.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<i>Basic Minimum Wages</i>	<i>Monthly contracts/per month</i>	<i>Ticket contracts per completed ticket</i>
Male workers over 21	99/-	116/-
Other workers	72/-	84/-

<sup>6</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/8: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

passage'. These estates then experienced a flush of coffee in the last week of the month and were forced to organise 'a "self help" scheme'<sup>8</sup> to get their coffee picked. Pickers were transported in from the company's other estates and from a neighbouring sisal plantation.

By the middle of May there were clear indications of a most serious situation. The entire Kiambu reserve of casual labour was effectively, in all but name, on strike. Thousands of experienced coffee labourers stayed away forcing a public controversy between the K.F.L. and the K.C.G.A. over the picking rate. According to the latter, workers were receiving the season's rate agreed with Union. This prompted an intervention from Tom Mboya to avert a potential catastrophe, who made clear that he was "determined that the present crop will be picked".<sup>9</sup> He addressed a meeting on May 22nd of 'about' 3,000 workers, 'most of them women', at Kibichoi near Ruiru in an effort to persuade coffee pickers from the reserve to turn out. During the course of the meeting there was considerable restiveness as it became clear that 'many' workers would not pick coffee at 60 cents per debe and were opposed to the productivity drive set at the 2 debes minimum. Mboya was compelled to give rhetorical expression to the collective anger and told those assembled that the present rate of pay was too low and that he would meet the growers within the next few days to present their demand for "considerably more cash per debe". If this were turned down the K.F.L. would continue to press for an increase until it was met. He later denied telling the pickers to go slow and insisted that his appeals to them had been 'to work hard and pick as much as they could'.<sup>10</sup> As in the past, Mboya was playing the role of shock absorber, working to demobilise the external movement by deflecting its motive conflict onto an enclosed stage of negotiation controlled by union officials.

According to the Labour Office there was no apparent reaction from Githunguri to Mboya's plea for a turn out. Yet again, it seems indicative of the stubborn mood developing amongst these key workers that they would not pick at the rate chosen by the employers and imposed by Union leaders. The latter were hardly able to exercise control as workers refused to heed their calls and treated Mboya's pleas with scepticism despite his reputation. Mboya now knew that the peace would have to be bought at a price. In a veritable twelfth hour settlement which just coincided with the flush on 'many' estates in the area, a deal was sealed after 'a long argument' by the Union for a rate of 80 cents. By the end of the month, reports reaching the Labour Office indicated that conditions were returning to normal and that estates in area were receiving casuals in increasing numbers. The

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<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>9</sup> E.A.S. 9 May 1960: 'Agreement in coffee industry.'

<sup>10</sup> E.A.S. 24 May 1960: 'Coffee Growers reply to pay claim.'

district officer in Gatundu estimated that some 15,000 to 20,000 casuals were now coming out each day from his division to pick coffee. Some estates even reported receiving 'more pickers than they can cope with.'<sup>11</sup> Overall, during the course of June there were no difficulties in obtaining casual labour and by the end of the month picking was almost complete in Makuyu and Donyo Sabuk, though still in progress in parts of Mitubiri, Thika and Ruiru.<sup>12</sup>

This was a substantial partial gain which the union bureaucracy had negotiated only under unbearable pressure from the members. Apparently, the Union was only able to 'make a realistic approach to the problem' after Mboya's intervention to reduce its demands. Negotiations were tempered by 'the appreciation' on the part of Union officials that production costs could not be allowed to rise in the face of falling coffee prices, a realisation 'considerably assisted by the presence of Mr Mboya.' Given their intermediate position, Union officials were unable to deliver on both sides of the account. Just as they were found wanting when it came to pressing beyond the minimum for their members, they had also disappointed the employers through their inability to restrain the movement on the plantations. The C.B.K. looked forward to circumstances which would 'produce leaders able to maintain discipline within the Union and competent to negotiate with employers'.<sup>13</sup>

All throughout, the behaviour of the Union bureaucracy revealed inherent contradiction as it oscillated between the opposed demands of its members and those of the employers. What gains were made were the by-product of spontaneous unofficial action by workers themselves. The K.C.G.A. had called upon an untested ally to salvage the coffee crop when the planters were on their knees. Few junctures could have been more favourable for union leaders to extract unconditional recognition, access to estates, pay and conditions all at once. The opposite occurred as union officials scrambled to rescue the employers in their hour of need. The state was weakening, suffering from prolonged exposure and unable to secure the necessary supplies of labour power. Controls over the labour market and the power to conscript had been relinquished. Its only recourse was to lean on the union bureaucracy to push workers into selling their labour power close to the employers' terms.

Far from halting the surge forward, the achievement of limited access and a wage concession encouraged workers to make further claims. Union officials were forced to submit these from a position of strength, though they were uneasy with this power. Wachira's circular of June 3rd to the

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<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

<sup>12</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1960.

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1960.

branches made clear that 'employers in all coffee farms in Kenya would recognise our Union as the right one to cater for all employees in all requirements...'. It also revealed that an agenda had been drawn up in conjunction with the K.C.G.A. outlining issues for future negotiation including wage increments, 'good houses', 'ample' medical facilities, old age gratuities and bonuses, paid leave, discharge notices and 'reasonable work during reasonable period of time.' The Union had also asked the K.C.G.A. to consider a contributory provident fund scheme based on 10% contributions from both sides and applicable to all workers on completion of 12 months continuous service.<sup>14</sup> According to the Labour Office 'several' employers in the district were 'filled with apprehension at the thoughts of these various proposals.' The K.C.G.A. were also riled over the 'wording' of the circular which they thought 'somewhat unfortunate in that it created the impression that employees were to pick only two debbies'. Apparently Wachira had failed to abide by an undertaking given to the K.C.G.A. to visit estates 'to correct this wrong impression'. The impact on productivity was that 'many workers' would only pick the two debe task 'for a long time after the circular had come out.'<sup>15</sup> In fact Union officials had been conscientious in encouraging workers to pick more than 2 debes a day but had run into deep resistance. This had caused major problems at Gachego estate in Kiambu where Roman Mbugua, a union agitator, had been sacked for being a 'bad' worker, 'talking more than working'. Mbugua seems to have ignored the directives of union officials and told workers around the estate to pick 2 debes 'only'. The estate's 31 workers came out on strike alleging Mbugua's victimisation as the Union's 'shop steward' and put forward demands for increased rations, better housing and provision of latrines. They told the Labour Officer that they 'knew Mr Mboya had told people to pick more than 2 debes, but that Roman had been to the K.F.L. offices on May 24th, where Gachago had told him to pick no more than 2 debes.'<sup>16</sup> Though this allegation was denied by union officials, it seems to indicate their characteristic inconsistency in response to contradictory pressures.

Nonetheless, the pressure was on for union leaders to deliver as they were forced to take up demands from an expectant membership. The new demands were spelt out in the 'Memorandum on Terms and Conditions' submitted to the K.C.G.A. in which the length and intensity of the working day and payment beyond its limits were most prominent. The Union laid down that the normal working day 'will consist' of seven hours a day with five hours on Saturdays, and that for every hour beyond its stipulated limits a worker 'will be' entitled to overtime payment on the basis of time and a

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Circular from the General Secretary to all branches, 3 June 1960.

<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1960.

<sup>16</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/205: L.D. 98 Strike Reports.

half for normal days and double rates for Sundays and public holidays. It also asserted that 'The Industry will recognise...' Sundays, and public holidays. The Union then resolved to put a limit on the employers productionist offensive with the proposal that 'the present practice of tasks in the industry shall be completely reviewed to fit in with the need to respect working hours', though the door was left ajar for the employers with the proviso that 'maximum output be maintained'. To achieve this the Union proposed that a joint committee be set up with the employers to investigate the relationship between working hours and 'the task commensurate with such time.' The recurrence of 'wills' and 'shalls' revealed something of the determination amongst the members to extend their success over pay. The wages question would never leave the agenda and a starting payment of 75/- was proposed for labourers plus rations and housing, a figure more than double the present signing on rate of 36/-.

A meeting between the two sides ensued where agreements were signed concerning estate committees and rules of access in which union officials abdicated their position of strength and allowed themselves to be intimidated into giving undue favour to the employers. Under the access agreement, union meetings could only take place after a written application to the management, giving seven days notice submitting an enclosed agenda. The Union leadership acceded the right of management to be present and to the K.C.G.A. demand that there should not be more than three meetings on any estate in any calendar year. The proposals concerning estate committees heralded the formal revival and a renewed role for the old kiamas<sup>17</sup> which had mostly fallen by the wayside. These were to be revamped as 'consultative committees' or works councils consisting of nine members, five elected workers' representatives and four management nominees including the chairman. Workers under twenty could not stand as representatives and casuals were denied the right to vote.<sup>18</sup> There was a calculation by the employers that once conditions became more settled

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<sup>17</sup>The role of kiamas on sisal and coffee estates were the focus of long standing grievance amongst estate workers. According to Thika's Labour Office, 'the pioneer farmers use the Council of Elders [Kiamas] as machines for maintaining peace and order amongst the labourers in the camps'. [K.N.A./VK/2/30: S.J.Okelo/ L.O./Thika to the K.C.G.A Chief Executive Officer, 22 August 1962] These had existed for 'many years' and functioned as a kind of ad hoc labour court, on the 'nod and wink' from the district commissioners. [K.N.A./VK/2/30: Apollo Owiti to the Minister of Legal Affairs, 25 July 1962] The Union complained that they existed 'for the purpose of fining workers', anything between 5/- and 50/-, and that 'no Government receipts or any other kind of receipts' were issued. [K.N.A./VK/2/30: S.J.Okelo, L.O./Thika to the K.C.G.A Chief Executive Officer, 22 August 1962] Whilst the Labour Department condemned these as 'illegal practices', it had nonetheless tolerated them over a long period. As the department attempted to erect a system of industrial relations for the plantation sector founded on estate consultative committees, there was less incidence of illegal fining. [K.N.A./VK/2/30: C.H. Malavu/ S.L.O./Central Province to L.O./Thika, 13 August 1962.]

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1960.

these structures, combined with tightly controlled 'access', would enable them to institutionalise workplace conflicts and to reassert their hold over the workforce.

This formalised a transmutation which had begun in early January when, following the example of other industries, coffee growers and union officials agreed to establish works councils 'within the shortest possible time'. The immediate tasks before these bodies was to ensure that workers turned out for the picking season. Many coffee farmers had already been making more use of their 'kiamas', precursors to the works councils, in the day to day running of their estates in a desperate attempt to get 'their own house in order as rapidly as possible'.<sup>19</sup> Introduced on some plantations during the Emergency, estate committees had been ostensibly encouraged by the Labour Department to prepare workers for 'responsible' trade unionism. They had mostly fallen into disuse but their revival under a new guise, with the collusion of union officials, was an attempt to pursue the Department's concerns with renewed urgency. The corporatist character of these make overs made them all but structures of compromise. Here the affairs of the coffee union were to be taken out of the hands of the members and placed at the footstool of the employers. Aimed as an alternative to trade unions, works councils were devised to give the semblance of autonomy to workers whilst all essential powers were to be unconditionally wielded by the owners. Would this machinery be assembled fast enough to bring the upsurge under control? In the early stages of their restoration, these committees tended to flounder as they came up against the determined mood of strikers who were impatient to secure gains. This was reflected in the invariable refusal by workers to return to work as a prerequisite for negotiations.

Some of these problems surfaced at a workers meeting at Rubislaw estate on June 10th. Acknowledging the widespread scepticism towards the Labour Department, Jesse Gachago objected to the presence of its officials and indicated that they would 'not be allowed to attend such meetings in future'. Paradoxically, headmen and nyaparas, a layer under siege, had been invited to the meeting. The purpose of Gachago's visit was to spell out the conditions of productivity underlying the recent agreement with the employers. He emphasised that if 'an employee' picked two debes he would get his daily rate plus rations, but that an 'employee' who picked only one debe would 'not be supported' by the Union. Above the agreed minimum, the Union would 'not agree' with any manager who asked a worker to pick four debes a day. When asked questions about housing, water supply and medical treatment, Gachago declined to respond on the grounds that 'it was not appropriate for him to discuss such matters at the meeting', since these were 'being dealt with at

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<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, January 1960.



high level'.<sup>20</sup> The initiative and assertiveness of workers having been aroused by a partial victory were being usurped by their officials and used to arrest their self movement.

Gachago's display of intransigence towards an exposed Labour Department was partially a ploy to sell a productivity deal to his members. It was a posture which seemed at odds with that of Wachira who told K.C.G.A. representatives in Nyeri on July 6th that he 'would not object to Government Officers being invited to attend meetings'. The meeting was called to discuss the formalities of organisation, including the collection of dues and adherence to the access agreement. Mindful of the Registrar's watchful eye, Wachira agreed that union officials should be in possession of proper credentials and for collectors to use proper receipt books, though initially he would 'not be able to trust the persons appointed to collect money with a receipt book'.<sup>21</sup> This confession of distrust in his own members was an attempt to disassociate himself from the alleged disarray discovered during the course of the Registrar's concerted probing of the Union's financial affairs.

### *The Politics of Book keeping*

Severing the ties between union officials and the members, dividing Union members from each other, separating the C.P.W.U. from politics and cutting its links with other unions. All this lay behind the Registrar's agenda of narrowing the functions of the Union to those of strict accounting and control. The focus of the Union was to be reduced to purely administrative functions with even its limited political and social aims discarded. In this way the Union was to be reduced to an appendage of the state and primed for root and branch estate corporatism.

Exercising his powers under the Trade Union Ordinance<sup>22</sup>, the Registrar initiated what was to become a long and unrelenting state harassment of the fledgling organisation. After an investigation in March, the Registrar found the Unions financial records to be in 'a deplorable state of affairs'<sup>23</sup>, hastily thrown together after an inspection notice. The Union's accounts, which covered the period from its inception in November 1959 to January 31st 1960, had apparently lapsed after the treasurer had retired to his reserve. With no receipt books in use, 'transactions were set out on loose sheets of paper, from which the cashbook was compiled so hurriedly that it resembled a record of errors and

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Industrial Relations Assistant/ Nairobi, 14 June 1960.

<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Meeting between K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U. at the Nyeri Labour Office, 6 July 1960.

<sup>22</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, Section 48 [1952].

<sup>23</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: J.F.C.Powis /Labour Commissioner/ to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 28 May 1960.

omissions'. The Registrar's report alleged 'negligence' and 'inefficiency' in the handling of receipts and concluded that the Union's lack of knowledge of financial management was to blame. These shortcomings were brought to the attention of the general secretary who was 'instructed to have the cash book reconstructed systematically, accurately and up to date by the end of April'.<sup>24</sup> The Union was also told to submit all its vouchers, receipts and receipt books, bank statements and cheque books together with the balance of cash in hand. Opening the door to victimisation and harassment, the Registrar demanded a register of members 'for my inspection'.<sup>25</sup> It seemed that the Registrar was using expectant problems of the Union's development to prepare the ground for a potential assault on the organisation. The Union then made strenuous and visible efforts to run its financial affairs in accordance with state diktats, and it seemed that there was no further case to answer. In mid-May, the Registrar reported 'a great improvement' in the Union's accounts<sup>26</sup> and the threat to use its financial disarray as a pretext to close the organisation down seemed to have temporarily receded.

However, other technicalities surfaced with profound implications for the continued existence of the union. The Registrar raised objections to its' leading officials on the grounds that they were not working on the plantations but employed solely by the Union. During the course of May, leading officials had been sacked from their plantation jobs and, with an unofficial blacklist in operation, only their own union would employ them. Amongst them was the Union's treasurer and its president, Muchonge Mwendandu, who had been dismissed from his job at Samuru Estate in Thika.<sup>27</sup> Whilst the Registrar was unrelenting in his criticism of the Union's book keeping and accounting system, its treasurer was subsequently forced to resign 'because he was not allowed by the law to work in the office as a full time basis....'<sup>28</sup> Still, even as the young union took its pedestrian steps, not the slightest deviation from regulation was allowed. The Registrar gave notice that the Union was contravening the Trade Union Ordinance<sup>29</sup> and that only his permission would enable it to appoint people from 'outside' the industry. This played on the unfamiliarity of workers with administrative tasks as they were defined and required to be carried out by the Registrar, a problem accentuated by the Union's lack of qualified staff. A flagrant warning followed 'that by the powers granted to me'<sup>30</sup>, the

<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./VK2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Report of the Section Officer of an investigation of the accounts of the C.P.W.U., 29 March 1960.

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./VK2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Registrar of Trade Unions to the General Secretary of C.P.W.U. 31 March 1960.

<sup>26</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Registrar of Trade Unions to the Labour Commissioner, 13 May 1960.

<sup>27</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to the Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 20 May 1960.

<sup>28</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: C.P.W.U. Annual Conference, Treasurers Report, May 13-14th, 1961.

<sup>29</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, Section 29 [1] [b], [1952].

<sup>30</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, Section 17 [2] [e], [1952].

Registrar would cancel or suspend the Union's registration if it 'wilfully and after notice'<sup>31</sup> contravened the provisions of the ordinance. This was an attempt to obstruct the development of the Union at a time when its membership was expanding and the need for full-time officers was at a premium. The Thika and Kiambu branches, where most members were concentrated, were growing rapidly and a new branch in Nyeri was beginning to consolidate itself. The Registrar's requirement would make it difficult for the organisation to function as workers were denied the services and representation they needed. Many would drift away from the Union or be reluctant to pay their dues.

An inspection of the Union's accounts in mid June revealed a 'distinct improvement' on the 'unsatisfactory state of affairs prevailing on the last occasion of the investigation' on March 28th. Nevertheless, a wide array of 'anomalies' were identified. It was discovered that the bank accounts of the C.P.W.U. 'also embraced' sisal union monies, revealing the financial and structural interdependence between the two organisations. This prompted efforts by the investigating officer to sever their links. Income and expenditure in the Union's cash book also incorporated the finances of the S.P.W.U., drawing a complaint that 'a reconstruction to set matters right' had not been attempted. Whilst sisal union monies absorbed into C.P.W.U. accounts was noted as 'irregular', the latter had been debited for all expenditure incurred by the S.P.W.U. but 'no apportionment or allocation' had been affected. One of the greatest problems for the investigation was the fact that monies thought to belong to the sisal union were identified 'through the names of sisal estates appearing on the coffee receipts and vice versa which omitted to specify the nature of the industry concerning the member'. To some extent this 'confusion' was grounded on the interdependence of coffee and sisal production, where an increasing number of coffee plantations were also growing sisal and vice versa.<sup>32</sup> The two unions within a union were instructed to separate themselves thus ending their concentration of resources.

Another pressing issue for the investigation was the practice of branch treasurers in issuing receipts to collectors for incoming subs. The investigator complained that branch treasurers issued receipts but 'without identification by way of the collectors name and the receipt numbers covering his collections'. This made verification a near impossible task and was probably linked to security measures put in place by the Union to protect its collectors against victimisation. The investigator

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<sup>31</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61:Registrar of Trade Unions to the Labour Commissioner, 13 May 1960.

<sup>32</sup> Plantation workers were variously employed in the production of both crops particularly on those estates where coffee and sisal were grown side by side.

took special interest in the collection of strike funds, which were not shown as a 'separate entity' but were 'combined with donations', and 'teamed with general expenses'. During the course of the enquiry strike expenses were identified as an aggregate of food, advocates fees, transport, benefits and court fines. The investigator believed 'General Expenses' were highly suspect, for here lurked 'unanalysed' payments where all manner of discrepancy could be hidden.

The purchase of a union van for 2,000/- in March 1960 roused the criticism that, in just under two months, it had run up a 950/- repair bill. This was the cost of movement, utility and expansion with bad roads into the bargain. The growing, developing Union filtered motion through its very being. The examination of transport receipts raised complaints that no record of mileage covered 'on a particular trip', 'the reasons for the journey', 'the name and signature of the person who travelled' had been made. This came at a time when the organisation most needed transportation to consolidate its gains, by drawing new members into participation and responsibility. A passive membership left where it was would be carried along by the mood of the moment paying its subs when it could as opposed to when it should. The Registrar was uncompromising in imposing the strictest standards of book keeping and accounting whilst undermining the very means of holding new members and securing the subs. Here the state demonstrated its practice elsewhere of the arbitrary imposition of 'ideal types', a rigidly enclosed system which refused to allow for any self-movement apart from it. Union members were to be cast into bearers of this structure, a collection of passive subjects moulded into abstract conformity.

An array of receipts relating to advocates costs and court fines for various members and officials, including a traffic offence, were judged as incurred during the course of 'personal commitment' and not 'a justifiable debit against union funds.' Once again, these expenses were the appearances given by officials and activists engaged in union work. The resource contexts of this expenditure were conscientiously avoided by the auditor. The Registrar wanted to decide what was union business and what was 'personal commitment' by the organisation to its staff and members. The Trade Union Ordinance was brought into play on this score to strengthen the Registrar's hand, to the effect that the 'funds of a trade union shall not be applied either directly or indirectly in the payment of the whole or any part of any fines or penalty imposed on any person by sentence or order of a court of justice, other than a fine or penalty imposed upon the union under this Ordinance'.<sup>33</sup> The Registrar ordered that these payments be recovered from the 'people' concerned. Similarly the funding of a Christmas dance in December 1959 for the Union's staff was judged an 'unlawful appropriation of

<sup>33</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/3: Trade Union Ordinance, Section 44 [1952].

union funds for activities outside the scope of legitimate trade union expenditure'. All these concerns were deeply political.

Conversely, attempts to use allegations of non-payment of salaries to union officers became on later occasions the most favoured pretext to haul the organisation before the courts. By the investigator's own findings, no salary register was kept and attempts to trace the extent of each officer's salary 'proved futile'. Typically, during the course of a month, 'three or four advances against salary are made but the narrative on the final voucher contained neither rate nor the prepaid sums and their relative dates.' It was also noted that 'the incumbents were further remunerated under obscure terms as "pocket money", "cash" and "ration" '. For the investigator these were all 'open to question' as 'warrantable trade union expenditure'. The absence of a salary ledger 'made it difficult to ascertain any occurrence of overpayments'.<sup>34</sup> Not a few union officials subsequently came forward with allegations over the non-payment of wages to collaborate with the state prosecutor in bringing a case against their 'own' organisation. Hardly anything could be proved leaving only the say so of those who had turned state's evidence. It is more than likely that officials of this type were planted and paid off by the police as agents provocateur or informers.<sup>35</sup>

The Union's membership register was also poured over. This consisted of 152 files, one for each coffee estate, which revealed that a majority of 4,079 members from a total of 7,925 had paid no monthly subscription since acquiring membership. The investigator believed that this betrayed a tendency of the Union to direct its efforts at expanding the membership but that 'very little attempt at consolidation was made by following up regularly on the collection of monthly subscriptions.' Of the rest, 42% were over 13 weeks in arrears and had no voting rights. Instances were highlighted of 'irregularities' which 'invariably' allowed the Union to 'circumvent the disqualification of voting', since by permitting the payment of arrears to be entered against the month in which they were received, allowed 'a considerable number of defaulting members' to be 'embraced within the qualifying voting period'.<sup>36</sup> The Registrar drew the Union's attention to section 30 of the Trade Union Ordinance which stated that 'no person shall be a voting member of a trade union if his

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<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Report of the Section Officer of an Examination of the Accounts of the C.P.W.U., 13 June 1960.

<sup>35</sup> Victor Serge, *What Everyone Should Know About State Repression* [London, 1979]. Serge's study of the Russian Okhrana gives a detailed analysis of the recruitment and operations of agents provocateur. The psychology of these individuals is also explored. An important related work is S.Tchernomordik's *Bolsheviks under Illegality* [London, 1983].

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Report of the Section Officer of an Examination of the Accounts of the C.P.W.U., 13 June 1960.

monthly subscription is more than thirteen weeks in arrears'.<sup>37</sup> By enlarging its voting membership in this way, the Union was challenging the legal criteria as to who and who did not constitute a trade union member, and on what and whose terms workers could participate in the Union. This contested the very right of the state to take these decisions away from the organisation and determine them for itself. The investigator saw only a membership register riddled with apparent 'inconsistencies', mostly widespread arrears and inadequate record keeping. The instability afflicting plantation workers comprising unemployment, low wages, generalised deprivation and semi-proletarian ties were all reflected in the 'discrepancies' of the kept record. Here all the problems of building a workers' organisation and all the personal histories of its recruits appeared as shadows of an untouchable social being. The Registrar's desperate need for control, to quantify the membership and to determine its active and passive constituents, seemed to drive this probing towards the limits of indecency.

There was a deep seated fear of what lay outside the vision and beyond the reach of the state. The investigation suggested a side to the plantation unions that would and could not be incorporated, that whilst faceless and 'illegal' was nonetheless inextricably bound to its legal face. This caused a deep-seated unease in both the Labour Department and the Registrar's Office to such an extent that they wanted to suppress the organisation entirely, if not smash it completely. There was a paranoid urge to illuminate and account for everything, to bring the 'dark' side of the organisation out in the open and under total control. The pathological dimension to this obsession was revealed in opposition to the Union's financing of a poliomyelitis immunisation of its staff during an epidemic, condemned as 'unwarrantable expenditure'. This was hate for the very well being of the organisation. The uncharted flow of resources into the various activities of the union, to meet its responsibilities to the members and to oil its machine, was the ground chosen by that state to create the fictional pretexts it needed for its attempts to emasculate the organisation. All its income and expenditure had to be literally receipted and ledgered down to the last shilling. The slightest anomaly, real or imagined, became a relished excuse for intervention.

Shortly after the investigation, the Registrar instructed Union officials to immediately bring order into the organisation's affairs, laying down the strictest standards of bookkeeping and accounting. This was not a prescribed duty to be performed for the members, but on behalf of the state to which the Union was legally held to be primarily accountable. Overall, the investigation revealed only the

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<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: H.T.Pryor / Registrar of Trade Unions to C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 19 July 1960.

shadows of a movement going on elsewhere. This was the source of the Registrar's obsession to monitor the Union's activities, who its officials and agitators were, when and where they were going, who they were speaking to, what its size and strength was on the different estates. These considerations fuelled the desire for a close administration of the organisation's affairs. The vast array of quantitative materials in the form of receipts and vouchers were expressions of motion and development, of the union building which lay at the source of paradoxes in the cash register. They were coincident expressions of an external force that the state could barely keep up with and take control of. An 'order' was to be imposed on this chaos, but would this touch the social being beyond it? In the drive for logical consistency, an assemblage of fragments was required to feed and empower the Registrar's drive for control over the organisation. All these were the raw constituents of a barometer to measure the mood and strength of the membership and the degree of compliance amongst its labour lieutenants. Of course there was a small contingent of carefully placed 'union officials' and informers assisting this work by fingering the agitators and reporting back on the feeling amongst the members. By enforcing standards of the highest accuracy the Registrar was attempting to fashion an instrument to control a force that looked as if it might discard the straitjacket before it came out of the fitting room.

### *Union Officials Rescue the Apparatus of Managerial Authority*

The Registrar's offensive against the Union in the wake of its gains coincided with the reestablishment of estate committees whose first task was to restore the subordination of the workforce, though on new terms. This had the dual purpose of enabling the union bureaucracy to consolidate its position and the management to recover its flagging authority. For its part, the union bureaucracy aimed to integrate conservative, even anti-union, elements into the organisation's ranks. Their aim was to repair the tears and cracks in the apparatus of workplace control, reduce the militancy of a troublesome membership and strike a community of aim with the management. Restoring the position of the nyaparas who had been under siege since the beginning of the year, was a task beyond the employers themselves and went a long way towards restoring management control over the workforce and redeeming union officials in the eyes of the owners.<sup>38</sup> Along this road, the forces of conservatism could find their seat in the union bureaucracy, just as the latter sought out stability for themselves by encouraging these layers. The union leadership could then lean upon nyaparas and headmen against attempts by workers to make the Union an unconditional instrument of their interests. This was in line with the course towards corporatism whereby the Union would

<sup>38</sup> D.N.Hyde, *The Kenya Cannery Strike: A Case History of Betrayal*, unpublished S.O.A.S. paper, June 2000. Gives an account of parallel events that occurred in a factory setting during August 1960.

represent the interests of its members only in their subordinate status to the sacrosanct authority of the employers. The ground of this relationship lay in the drive for productivity and efficiency, a strategy dependent on close supervision.

The contradictions of trade union leadership became sharply apparent at Tatu estate in Ruiru. Many of the estate's workers were 'ex-detainees' and old scores were being settled with loyalist nyaparas and headmen. As a result, relationships between the company and the Union had visibly 'deteriorated'.<sup>39</sup> On June 29th 'approx. 200' workers gathered for a meeting addressed by Ruiru Organising Secretary Christopher Kariuki. A statement given to the Labour Department by a nyapara, Kamau Kimono gave details of the assembly which followed. Apparently Kariuki had written to the manager several days earlier requesting permission to hold a meeting on the estate, but when he arrived the manager told him that it was 'inconvenient.' Kariuki disregarded this and proceeded to convene the members, "I talk in front of you I will do so without fear because I was detained. I believe that nearly all of you took an oath. There may be two or three exceptions but that does not matter." Everybody clapped their hands.' Thereafter the meeting became focused on three 'black legs' who were held in much antipathy amongst the estate's workers. As to the other problems facing them, "I would therefore say that I am very much concerned with your needs which I will talk about later". The meeting became so preoccupied that these were not addressed at all.

Apparently Kariuki 'asked if anybody was prepared to go and call the manager or inform him that he was going on with the meeting and he was going to say everything frankly because he is not a C.I.D.' Kariuki then asked workers 'if they were prepared to relate their troubles on the estate?' Again, 'Everybody clapped their hands.' According to Kimono, Kariuki asked workers if they would 'be pleased' if "I mention the names of three C.I.D. on this estate".....Everybody shouted yes and clapped'. He then exposed the names of the estate headman Kangethe Karanja together with nyaparas Njoka Mola and Kamau Kimono. Kariuki 'went on to say that, those whose names he had mentioned were the people who were reporting everybody to the bwana and were being paid 2/-. They want to be promoted and everybody to be abused.' In his statement, Kimono denied that "I never be a C.I.D. and shall not be employed by them".<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1960.

<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Statement by Kamau Kimono employed by Tatu estate as a Nyapara, taken by Ernest Akach, the Labour Departments's Industrial Relations Assistant in Thika before Chief Nahashon Gichohi 13 July 1960.



According to Kangethe Karanja's statement, the assembly then became heated and something of a kangaroo court developed. With reference to a meeting held in May, Kariuki asked Karanja "if I was the man who accused 30 men and recommended their discharge. I stood and denied it". Kariuki then called the chairman of the union committee and 'warned him to get everybody including Kangethe enrolled' into the Union. Kariuki threatened that he would 'accuse the field conductor and those who refuse to join the union to the K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U.' He then branded Karanja, Mola and Kimono as 'black legs' and 'asked the baraza if they would be happy if these men are removed from the estate. Everybody clapped their hands. They were described as bad, full of 'fitina' and are normally bribed by the manager who is just as bad as themselves.' Kariuki then described Tatu estate 'as the worst shamba in Ruiru'.<sup>41</sup> It seems that he was trying to intimidate these 'black legs' into joining the Union, in a tact to eliminate the conflict between the workers and nyaparas. The unspoken aim was to reinstate the latter's authority, a task the management was unable to achieve on its own. As long as the apparatus of supervision was clothed in 'trade unionism', all would be in order. Kariuki had managed to sideline the issues of wages and conditions on the estate by deflecting attention onto the personifications of brutality and harshness in the workplace. This was a conscious diversion by which the two issues were kept separate. Nonetheless, the sources of erstwhile conflicts would remain as the rally for productivity and efficiency continued. Socfinal's response was to temporarily withdraw its permission to the Union to hold meetings on its estates, whilst the labour office accused it of making 'provoking statements threatening headmen and talking about the Emergency'.<sup>42</sup> This notwithstanding, the Union bureaucracy's pseudo irreconcilability was brought into play to restore the authority of the employers even in spite of themselves.

The transparency of this agenda became more clear with the intervention of branch secretary M.M. Christopher who told Tatu workers they were "all members of the Union to obey the employers and see that you are working properly according to the work you are given by your employers as well as the man given responsibility, the field conductors to work out with labour properly with no fitinas and not to spoil the employer's management". One of the workers asked, "What would happen to a member of the Union who blames the Union's work and he is no good to us?". Christopher then played chief advocate of the 'works council'.

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<sup>41</sup> K.N.A./ VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Statement by Kamau Kimani employed by Tatu estate as a Nyapara, taken by Ernest Akach, the Labour Departments's Industrial Relations Assistant in Thika before Chief Nahashon Gichohi 13 July 1960.

<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1960.

"I and the Manager are so concerned and apart from that anyone who does not to co-operative and have good relationship between the workers and employers is upon to the Estate Committee to decide what they can easily do to anyone who would bring trouble in an Estate. Before they do anything they must see the manager and speak out their difficult and the Manager will solve out your problem easily. The Estate Committee should work together with the nyaparas, field conductors and the Manager and see that everything is running properly. The estate committee is there to see that every one paying his monthly subscription and not to enforce but willing To."<sup>43</sup>

The estate committee was to act as a corporatist policing mechanism, disciplining workers into shouldering the demands of the employers. Its function was to arbitrate what were essentially collective antagonisms with the employer as individual conflicts.

During the course of July, these issues resounded at Union meetings around Thika district. The events at Swahara, Mellerstanes, Makindi and White Sisters estates where committees were established, were particularly instructive. Representatives from the Labour Department were allowed to become involved indicating their reinstatement by the Union and their essential role in laying the basis for estate corporatism. Both Wachira and branch secretary Isaac Kimono made clear to the members that 'all grievances in future will be dealt with by the estate committees first, and that the Union will not entertain any individual or collective 'shauris' unless supported by a letter from the committee', and that one of the duties of these committees was to organise the collection of union dues.<sup>44</sup> The estate committees were to be placed between the Union and its members, a tact by officials to wall themselves off from rank and file pressure. Here they were distancing and protecting themselves from having to deal with a range of problems facing estate workers. Ultimately, the union bureaucracy could only consolidate its intermediate position by seeking refuge under the canopy of the state, a trajectory inhibited all along down the line by the militancy of the membership. Only after Mboya had entrenched himself within the state apparatus, was this corporatist protection forthcoming.

Serious unrest at Mellerstanes Estate had been brought to a head over the sacking of twenty-five workers.<sup>45</sup> Wachira visited the estate on July 7th and in a private meeting with Edmunds, the owner, referred to the dismissals in the abstract stating 'that many employees were being discharged without reason'. Edmunds told Wachira that he 'was cutting down and insisted on his prerogative to hire and fire', a position 'Wachira accepted'. Wachira believed the police were harassing workers after work,

<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Labour Officer's Report of Tatu Workers' Meeting, 13 July 1960.

<sup>44</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1960.

<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Labour Officer/Thika to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 2 December 1960.

but Edmunds upheld their 'right' to 'enter the estate as and when they think if necessary'. Workers were then addressed by Wachira in the presence of Edmunds, but the sackings were 'not raised'. With the discharges displaced from the agenda, Wachira worked to redirect indignation onto the issue of rations which 'was the main subject discussed at the meeting'. Ration scales laid down by the Labour Department had been ignored by the management in favour of inferior provision. Mwaura, the head dairy clerk and a member of the estate committee, had taken advantage of the shortfall to trade provisions of his own. Workers alleged that he was calling all trade union members Mau Mau and 'telling them that they will be discharged'. Mwaura was 'very unpopular' and workers refused to accept him as a member of the estate committee. After Edmunds gave way over the issue of rations, other problems emerged. Workers expressed 'much' resentment at police raids on their labour lines on the pretext of illegal brewing. Some of them had been arrested as 'brewers' and their friends and family members as 'trespassers'. One worker had been interrogated by the police about the theft of milk and threatened with repatriation back to his reserve.

On the same day, Thika branch secretary Isaac Kimono addressed workers at Makindi estate. Before the meeting Kimono approached the manager with an agenda of issues he planned to put to the estate's workers, as the Union was required to do under the access agreement. Once again, the meeting was overseen by representatives from the management and the Labour Department. The Union bureaucracy's concerns for subscriptions, management authority and functioning estate committees dominated the meeting. There were again signs of manoeuvres by Union officials to abandon any direct contact with the members by using the estate committee to mediate between themselves and the members. Kimono told the gathering that the branch office would 'not entertain any individual complaint' in future unless it was supported by 'a letter from the estate committee'. There was evidently a serious problem in getting workers to pay their subs, always a barometer of support for the Union's leadership. Kimono urged those who had joined but had 'discontinued' paying their monthly subscriptions to go to the branch office and 'pay up'. Apparently 'some' members were going to the office with complaints 'that the manager is bad'. Kimono told the meeting that these complaints would not be accepted because 'the manager has always been very co-operative with all employees'.<sup>46</sup> The access agreement was evidently transforming the young Union into a management fifth column. Kimono continued these refrains at a meeting on July 28th at White Sisters Estate. The estates workers were criticised for their 'habit' of bypassing the 'Farm Committee' and coming to the union office with their complaints. He insisted that grievances be dealt with in the first instance by the committee and 'only forwarded to his office when settlement

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Labour Officer's Report of Meeting at Makindi Estate, 8 July 1960.

had failed'. He also appealed to workers to pay their subs, again through the committee. To cover this retreat into subordination, Kimono held out the prospect of an end of harvest bonus payment.<sup>47</sup>

During the course of September and October union officials were busy visiting estates around the district addressing workers with the aim of founding estate committees and legitimising existing ones. Enlisting new recruits and regimenting members into paying their subs was an ongoing struggle. Workers were learning about the contradictory social nature of a union bureaucracy that was using all its energy to effect accommodation where there was room for none and healing the breaches of previous months by pushing workers into subordination. At Kanyeri estate the labour inspector was called out on September 12th after workers complained that they had been 'manhandled' by the headman. The dispute was steered towards the formation of an estate committee to investigate their grievances.<sup>48</sup> During the course of meetings in early October at Bahati and Jumapili estates, Kimono told workers that the aim of the Union was to encourage 'good relations' between them and 'their headmen'. At Bahati Estate he appealed for all 'fitina' between workers and headmen to cease and that the Union 'wanted to see that their members were hardworking people because it was against laziness'. He also emphasised that the Union 'was not a political one or a mau mau organisation' and chastised workers for 'not paying their subs regularly'.<sup>49</sup> Once again, the prevalence of these problems and tensions was steered towards the formation of an estate committee. Things went roughly at Munyara Estate when on October 19th, Kimono refused to address a meeting because the manager wanted the headman to interpret his speech. Kimono 'flatly refused' to have any interpreter other than his own driver. He then left estate and drove off 'without telling the workers why the meeting was cancelled'. It was a continuing paradox of the Union bureaucracy's behaviour that it was often unable to perform its role as employers' advocate through positive identification with their serjeants.<sup>50</sup>

These attempts to give roots to corporatism were badly shaken by the Kenyatta Day strikes of October 20th which united workers throughout Thika and Kiambu in what was a simultaneous political strike. Kiambu witnessed over 1,300 workers taking action at six estates. Reports from Ruiru 'indicated that everything was normal' whilst in Thika township a boycott was almost 100% effective as all bars, hotels and shops were closed and the majority of Africans stayed away from

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Labour Officer's Report of Meeting at White Sister's Estate, 28 July 1960.

<sup>48</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, September 1960.

<sup>49</sup> K.N.A./ VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: filenote by S. Mkala, 1 October 1960.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./ VK/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Industrial Relations Assistant, 21 October 1960.

work. While some key petrol stations were manned by Asians, motor transport came to a standstill and all the garages were closed. Whilst 'on a number' of coffee estates workers did not appear for work, the strike seemed less well supported than in the town. This should not lead us to suppose that workers energies were exhausted from the previous months of struggle. On one Kiambu estate, labourers would only start work after the manager explained to them that Kenyatta Day 'was not a call for a strike but merely a boycott of buses, bars, etc.' Whilst at Karangaita, Koorali and Kiganda estates in the district where the management 'made no such attempt', over 350 workers remained on strike. Several estates in Thika also reported that casual labour from the reserve did not show up for work.<sup>51</sup> The general politicisation appeared to deepen when on November 11th, a K.A.N.U. rally held in Thika attracted a crowd of 35,000.

By this time it appears that serious consideration was being given to gathering an army of strike-breakers. Following the use of convict labour during the recent railway strike, Thika's Labour Officer attended a meeting addressed by the Commissioner of Prisons and the Executive Officer of the Kenya Prisoners' Aid Association at which it was decided to form a local branch of the organisation. The first meeting of the Thika committee took place on November 4th at which the Labour Officer became its secretary 'in an effort to get things going'.<sup>52</sup> These preparations revealed a further side to corporatism, that should the estate committees fail in their task of preventing conflicts a reserve army of 'scab' labour would be dragooned to break workers' resolve.

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<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./AF /1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Report, October 1960.

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./AF /1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Report, November 1960.

## 7. *The Crisis of Leadership within the C.P.W.U.*

### *The Attempt at Devolved Corporatism*

During the course of 1961 there 'was much activity in the field of industrial relations'<sup>1</sup> characterised by attempts to move towards structures of bargaining in which trade union strength appeared to increase. In essence, union leaders were pushing to secure their place by establishing their independence from the membership, a move calculated to make themselves less accountable. Once external conflicts were defined and institutionalised, the active resistance of plantation workers would be reduced to the passive shadow posturing and manoeuvring of union officials. The Labour Department's aim was to empower union officials to move away from and loosen ties with their members in this way. This course was fraught with contradictions as union officials were under severe pressure to deliver some real gains for the membership. Otherwise, they risked losing members and subs along with their much sought after bureaucratic independence. The state's concern was to deflect conflicts away from its centre to be defused on a local level. There was an attempt to devolve mediation and make less use of the Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance. The use of statutory powers risked transforming even the smallest conflicts into major political confrontations with the potential to draw in wider sections of workers. This change of course required the collusion of the trade union bureaucracy to succeed, but would they be strong enough to play their prescribed role of labour lieutenants?

According to the Labour Commissioner the establishment of the formally constituted National Joint Consultative Council between the K.F.L. and the F.K.E. was a 'unique achievement'.<sup>2</sup> This marked an alternative to statutory conciliation and arbitration and, as a result, the relationship between the F.K.E. and the K.F.L. grew closer, though at the expense of a diminished role for the Labour Department. The rules and constitution of the new body provided that, in the event of deadlocked negotiations between the parties or their affiliates, the matters in dispute could be referred to ad hoc joint dispute commissions composed of representatives from the employers and 'a similar number' from the workers. In the coffee industry, these commissions were empowered to hold inquiries, hear evidence, and make recommendations towards securing the settlement of

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<sup>1</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/100: L.D.A.R. 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

disputes.<sup>3</sup> Even with the use of the new disputes commissions, 70 conflicts were still referred to the government for statutory settlement during the course of 1961.

On the coffee plantations the aim of devolved corporatism was to 'give employees a wider interest in and greater responsibilities for conditions under which their work is performed.' It relied much more on voluntary consent by workers and their representatives in order to relieve the stress on the Labour Department. This voluntarism was to be bounded and overseen by a Standing Joint Council [S.J.C], established as a result of the formal recognition agreement between the C.P.W.U. and the K.C.G.A. which became effective from November 3rd 1960. The S.J.C. was modelled on the Joint Industrial Council which had been established for the docks industry after the 1958 strike. The council had a broad range of responsibilities, though high on its agenda were 'improvements in the method and organisation of work.'<sup>4</sup>

A whole range of claims and grievances, defined as 'matters of principle' for workers and employers as a whole, were identified and bound for the sole consideration of this agency. These embraced basic rates of pay, hours of work, overtime rates, methods of wage payment, working conditions, leave, contracts of service, shift and task work, redundancy and safety measures. All other matters would 'first be considered at the estate level'.<sup>5</sup> Estate committees, revamped earlier in the year to diminish the Union and incorporate its officials, were formally designated as a subordinate tier of the new apparatus. Their prescribed function was to deal with the 'implementation of agreements'. These covered holiday arrangements, social and welfare activities, improvements in 'job methods', training, health and discipline. At the same time they were to uphold an informal, though exhaustive grievance procedure where the first recourse of workers was to the estate headmen, then their union representative followed by the estate committee's secretary who would decide 'whether the case should be taken or not'. The secretary had the power to make enquiries into the case and take it up with the estate's manager. Failing a settlement at this level, the secretary was required to report the matter to the estate committee 'who shall report to the general secretary of the Union.' The latter would then take up the case with the Executive Officer of the K.C.G.A., failing which the matter would be finally referred to the S.J.C.<sup>6</sup> As complaints progressed through

<sup>3</sup> K.N.A./VK/ 2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Memorandum of Agreement between the K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U., 'In matters of recognition and negotiating procedure...', 3 November 1960.

<sup>4</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U.1959-61: Memorandum of Agreement between the K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U., 'In matters of recognition and negotiating procedure...', 3 November 1960.

<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, November 1960.

<sup>6</sup> K.N.A./VK/ 2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Memorandum of Agreement between the K.C.G.A. and the C.P.W.U., 'In matters of recognition and negotiating procedure...', 3 November 1960.

the apparatus they became ever more removed and out of view. A precondition for these recognition arrangements was that supervisory workers would be banned from joining the Union, a concession to employers struggling to reassert their authority. The recognition agreement directed its exclusion at those 'categories' of workers "who exercise confidential, directive, administrative, representational and supervisory functions" <sup>7</sup>, in order to draw them closer to the bosom of the management.

### *The Crisis of Leadership Matures*

Even before the ink was dry, the access agreement was put into question by the alleged activities of Thika branch secretary Isaac Kimono who 'had gone out side the rules covering access to estates' and had been arrested for being drunk and disorderly on an estate in Makuyu and fined 30/-. The general secretary was warned by the K.C.G.A. that unless rules of access were 'rigidly complied with', no more Union meetings would be permitted.<sup>8</sup> There were further difficulties involving the C.P.W.U. bureaucracy relating to the unpaid salaries of some of its branch officials in Kabete and Kiambu, who reported the matter to the Labour Office, exposing the Union at a time when the Registrar was looking for pretexts to tighten the legal straitjacket.<sup>9</sup> There were also problems of language and handling in the way that Kimono in particular was addressing workers in a bureaucratic fashion. The crisis of leadership within the C.P.W.U. erupted to the surface on November 11th with the decision its executive committee to suspend Godwin Wachira, the general secretary, 'pending investigations'<sup>10</sup> into an alleged misappropriation of 15,000/- from Union funds. Wachira was charged with 'theft by servant'<sup>11</sup> and appeared before the Thika Resident Magistrate's Court on December 28th where he of pleaded guilty to embezzling 3,797/-. He was bound over for 12 months on a bond of 200/- and banned from holding any office<sup>12</sup> in the trade union movement<sup>13</sup>, and from entering farms in the district to discuss trade union matters. This judgement was supported by a resolution from his own executive committee which appointed Christopher Kariuki from the Ruiru branch in his place.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Filenote by O.J. Mason / Senior Labour Officer/ Central Province, 22 November 1960.

<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, November 1960.

<sup>9</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/9: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, November 1960.

<sup>10</sup> K.N.A./VK/ 2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Filenote by O.J. Mason / Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 22 November 1960.

<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./VK/ 2/24 / C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/ Central Province, 4 January 1961.

<sup>12</sup> M.R.C./MSS/ 292/967.1/6: Trades Union Ordinance, Section 29 [2], [1952].

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./VK/ 1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1961.

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./MC/3/2/ Trade Unions / Policy and General: Confidential Report by the Thika District Commissioner of a meeting 'with special reference' to Godwin Wachira, attended by the District Officer, Chief Ali and Christopher Kariuki.



Many employers were glad to see the back of Wachira since 'it has been said by some' that had he led the recent negotiations an agreement 'much more favourable'<sup>15</sup> to workers would have resulted. To some extent his removal was a sacrificial display to the Registrar that the C.P.W.U. was getting its finances in order and that its problems on this score were down to its former general secretary. The financial issue was a recurrent one and the Union had to tread with caution through a minefield of legalities, always under the concerted gaze of the Registrar's Office. The slightest hint of 'corruption' could become an excuse to threaten the continued existence of the organisation.

The internal crisis within the Union came to a head, brought on by contradictory pressures of adaption to the employers and the state, and the need to deliver some gains to ensure that subscriptions came in from an expectant membership. On November 25th, Kariuki sent out a circular to branches and estate committees to ask all members to subscribe 3/- to what appeared to be a strike fund. He urged that the 'collection will help us while we are fighting for our wages, and with other complaints', intimating that though a struggle would begin on December 14th, 'we don't know when it will be end , and reach agreement or not. Therefore we must be ready. You will get more information from your nearest Branch.'<sup>16</sup> Was Kariuki taking the helm with a clarion call to action, or was this a stunt to raise badly needed funds? Threatening a police investigation, Kiambu's District Commissioner expressed his misgivings to Kariuki 'about certain activities of your Union ..., especially with regard to the collection of money' and reminded the Union that it was required to apply to him to grant a licence to hold a collection under the provisions of the Public Security [Public Collections] Regulations [1960]. The Union's Kiambu organiser had told Labour Officer, W.M.P.Heath-Saunders that the purpose of the collection was to build up 'sadly depleted' funds which were "carelessly handled" by the former general secretary. Heath-Saunders believed Kariuki's circular<sup>17</sup> was a rhetorical exhortation with no necessary implications of industrial action. There may have been some doubts on this score when the S.J.C. met in Ruiru on December 14th to discuss the union's wage claim of 100/- a month and other improvements. While Kariuki was prepared to settle at a minimum of 75/-, the K.C.G.A. offered only 10%, bringing the basic wage to 42/-. Kariuki dare not go lower and warned the employers , "If we do not get 75/- a month by the New Year, we

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<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32 : Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, February 1961.

<sup>16</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: General Secretary's circular to all branches and estate committees, 25 November, 1960.

<sup>17</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U.1959-6: W.M.P.Heath Saunders/Kiambu Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 6 December 1960.

will strike. Every estate in Kenya will be affected and more than 45,000 men will come out."<sup>18</sup> The meeting ended in a deadlock.

Indicating the pressure it was under, the Union resubmitted its 100/- claim at a further meeting on January 3rd, 1961. Agreement was reached on changes to the ticket system and pay differentials, bringing the women's rate was to four fifths that of a male worker. The Union agreed that wages and the value of rations should be consolidated. Whilst the employers had proposed a consolidated wage of 67/- per ticket they increased the figure to 75/-, thus narrowing the margin of negotiation with the Union which reduced its claim to 85/-. The employers agreed in principle to institute a provident fund scheme, holiday entitlement, improved medical facilities and sick leave.<sup>19</sup> The employers subsequently revised their pay offer to 76/- for the men, with 61/- for women and 51/- for juveniles effective from February 1st. There was also an agreement that the normal working week would be 47 hours, consisting of 5 days of 8hrs and 1 day of 7 hrs, a change that was to provoke fierce opposition from workers in the period ahead. Other issues agreed included the picking rate, overtime payments and termination of service.

These changes would provoke a great upheaval amongst plantation workers since, as acknowledged by Thika's Labour Office, 'many' employers would 'prune' their labour forces and discharge their 'less productive employees' in order to resource these concessions and avoid inroads into their dwindling profit margins. The most contentious issue however was the employers' demand for a 3 debes standard picking task<sup>20</sup>. The Union assented to this as a maximum with 2 debes as the minimum that workers would pick to qualify for the daily rate, so that officially there was no fixed standard task. This ambiguity invited estate employers everywhere to press their workers into picking three debes as a standard task. Their aim was to increase productivity on the backs of a reduced workforce, using redundancy as a guise for victimising union militants. This became the principal cause of conflict on the plantations in the period ahead. Would C.P.W.U. leaders be able to sell this package to its members? There was widespread restiveness in the Union over the new deal as many workers evidently felt let down by an agreement that fell far short of the 100/- claim that they were expecting. The local branch of the K.F.L. held a number of well attended mass meetings during March in Thika district addressed by its officials Apollo Owiti and Shadrack Avulala with the dual

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<sup>18</sup> E.A.S. 15 December 1960. '45,000 Workers May Strike.'

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Account of the Meeting of the Standing Joint Council for the Coffee Plantation Industry by M.A. Obel-Okelo/Assistant Industrial Relations Officer, 3 January 1961.

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report/ Agreement on Wages, Hours and Conditions in the Coffee Industry [Section 4], January 1961.

purpose of recruitment and restoring the 'sagging morale' within the C.P.W.U. over January agreement. The K.F.L. were also assisting the Union financially since 'many employees are not now paying their monthly subscriptions as they feel dissatisfied with the recent agreement'.<sup>21</sup> The federation was working overtime to fulfil its prescribed role of policing and disciplining its affiliates. The K.F.L.'s Thika branch was 'making its influence felt' as 'many' trade unions 'now take little action without consulting this organisation', and was 'particularly active'<sup>22</sup> during the annual conferences of both the coffee and sisal unions.

The meeting held on March 21st on open ground behind the Asian Sports Club in Thika township gives us some indication of the mood amongst the rank and file. The chairman and principal speaker was Avulala who opened the meeting 'by asking the audience to say "Uhuru na Mali"<sup>23</sup>, with the show of two fingers as usual.' He explained 'the general aims and objects' of trade unions and referred to the devices used by employers to split workers by dividing them into racial categories with different scales of pay, 'a very bad system' that could 'possibly be done away with should all workers be firmly united.' He 'then faced a hard time' after reading out the memorandum of agreement between the K.C.G.A. and the Union. Apparently, the contents of the agreement were 'bitterly resented' by the audience which became 'uproarious' as Avulala was confronted 'with provocative questions from all corners of the crowd'. He then attempted to defuse the indignation by calling representatives from every coffee farm to a meeting at the Union's offices on March 26th at which 'their objections to the agreements would be dealt with'.

This meeting exhibited some telling symptoms of the crisis of leadership within the Union. By Labour Office accounts, it 'was poorly attended...', a situation which Kariuki and Avulala sought to turn to their advantage. They conscientiously avoided all reference to disquiet amongst the members over the January agreement and deflected attention onto the low level of attendance and the incidence of 'corruption'. They tried to pass these off as problems confined to the branches, for which they had no responsibility. Hence their pointed emphasis that even though Ruiru branch officials had received notices to advertise the assembly, 'unfortunately none was present at the meeting'. At first, a decision was taken to cancel the meeting 'due to lack of attendance' but 'after consultation' with the Labour Inspector matters proceeded with 'less than 50' workers present. While Kariuki acknowledged that 'many members are known to have lost interest with the Union

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<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, March 1961.

<sup>22</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1961.

<sup>23</sup> Freedom and Wealth.

matters', he blamed this on complacency and 'a lack of co-operation' at branch level. He drew attention to the general dissatisfaction including complaints against members of the farm committees, allegations that some collectors were failing to forward subs to the Union and that other local officials had acquired reputations as "Blue eye Boys". Kariuki asked the meeting to report any allegations relating to the misappropriation of funds directly to himself to be investigated through the 'proper channel'. He also attempted to assuage workers with promises to investigate 'complaints lodged by members' against officials of both the coffee and sisal unions. To portray leaders such as himself as untainted by corruption and therefore able to deal with it amongst local officials was a gamble given the recent prosecution of Duncan Wachira. Avulala then told the audience that 'it had been decided' that each member of the coffee or sisal unions had to pay K.F.L. 'officiation fees' of 2/- as well as their 5/- monthly and 12/- annual membership fees. By the end of the meeting the audience had swelled to 80 workers. They were asked to pay their affiliation fees to the K.F.L. collector, 'but none paid'.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Breakdown of the January Agreement*

There was 'a great deal of discontent' amongst Union members with the terms of the January agreement and 'the casual way in which their affairs have been conducted by a number of officials'.<sup>25</sup> Workers' anger was 'concerned principally' with the longer working day, increased picking tasks and the lower picking rate for 1961 which was 5 cents down on the previous year. Unemployment was also hitting the membership hard and had encouraged the employers to maintain a depressed picking rate as the number of pickers engaged 'increased steadily'.<sup>26</sup> With the onset of the picking season in May, there was widespread insistence by the employers on three debes as a minimum standard task,<sup>27</sup> and estate committee members opposing this were victimised. By this time, the existing agreement on pay and conditions, due to run until February 1962, could be held together no longer.

Indicating the pressure he was under, Kariuki attempted to distance himself from the agreement's provisions, alleging that 'his predecessor was responsible for the agreement, and that he had only signed it in the belief that details had already been approved by members representatives'.<sup>28</sup> The executive council of the Union sandwiched between the transgressions of the employers and

<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/C.P.W.U. 1959-61 : Thika Labour Inspector's Report to the Thika Labour Officer of a C.P.W.U. meeting held at Ruiru on 26 March 1961.

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32 : Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1961.

<sup>26</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1961.

<sup>27</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: G.St.G.Catchpole/Labour Officer/Nyeri to C.P.W.U. Branch Secretary, 8 April 1961.

<sup>28</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, April 1961.

opposition to the deal from amongst the membership, shortly passed a resolution that the agreement be 'withdrawn immediately' and a date set for further negotiations.<sup>29</sup> In a move sanctioned by the K.F.L, the Union gave notice to the K.C.G.A. that it was cancelling the January agreement and going back to the old terms and conditions until further negotiation's in line with a resolution 'passed by all members'. The Union appeared steadfast after the K.C.G.A. drew its attention to a clause in the agreement which stated that the terms of the settlement could not be raised again for at least twelve months 'unless otherwise unanimously agreed' by the S.J.C.<sup>30</sup>

Always a barometer of the mood amongst the rank and file, large numbers of workers were not paying their subs and as a result the Union was unable to pay its staff. Kariuki was prosecuted and fined for non-payment of wages and ordered to meet all arrears. With no reserves to meet these costs, 'all office furniture, filing cabinet, duplicating and adding machines'<sup>31</sup> were requisitioned by the court and put up for auction. The dire straits of the Union's finances were revealed at its annual conference held on May 13-14th, when its treasurer reported a deficit of 68,485/-, including four months wage arrears to its staff of 22,479/-. The financial report revealed a split between the Central Executive Council and the Finance and General Purposes Committee, whose resolutions urging thrift and caution the former 'tries to ignore'. With Kariuki reappointed to office the conference proceeded to confirm the abrogation of the coffee agreement. To appease the discontent amongst the members, a resolution was passed presenting new demands to the employers. These included a minimum wage for adult males of 125/-, a minimum picking rate of 150 cents per debe, a forty hour week, eighteen days annual leave and a standard picking task of 2 debes. Other proposals concerning provident funds, annual and maternity leave, sick leave, medical benefits and notice on termination of service were also decided upon. By the end of the month however, Kariuki was in full retreat before the scale of the struggle facing the Union. He met with K.C.G.A. officials and agreed to press his executive committee to withdraw the Union's abrogation of the January agreement, though Thika's Labour Officer believed it 'highly unlikely' that the committee would agree to this.

Caught in a vice like grip, Kariuki attempted to consolidate his position with an appeal to the K.C.G.A. to impose the 'check-off' system 'as the only answer to the union's financial problems'. Kariuki hoped that this would secure the union bureaucracy in face of workers protests that it was acceding to the employers. To be sure, the 'check off' system would lift responsibility for collecting

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<sup>29</sup> E.A.S. 11 April 1961: 'Coffee Pay Pact Ends.'

<sup>30</sup> E.A.S. 1 April 1961: 'Coffee men will stand by agreement.'

<sup>31</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, April 1961.

dues from the shoulders of union officials with the employers undertaking this on their behalf by deducting at source. Hitherto, in neglecting or refusing to pay their subs, workers were able to register their approval or otherwise of the Union leadership. They could vote with their feet and make a statement about the ability of union officials to make representations on their behalf. Contrariwise, whilst the 'check off' system would secure the berths of union officials, it would also undermine the power of workers to sanction them into leading struggles for rights and benefits. The 'check off' system was in essence a move to disable the rank and file in order to secure the power of the trade union bureaucracy. It withdrew one of the few ways in which workers could call their leaders to account and impress their mood on representatives that depended on union dues for their jobs. At this juncture, the K.C.G.A. hesitated at the risks of imposing such a system and 'declined to give any definite answer...'. Would this measure provoke spontaneous strikes in protest at arbitrary deductions?<sup>32</sup>

Kariuki 'threatened to call a General strike'<sup>33</sup> from July 6th if the Union's recent conference demands submitted to the K.C.G.A. were not considered. The Union held meetings in Ruiru and Thika during the month where workers again expressed their anger over long hours and other issues troubling them such as unpaid Sunday working and that they were 'not allowed to take shelter when it rained.'<sup>34</sup> Though, according to the Labour Inspector, these meetings 'were poorly attended', the Union leadership were sure 'that all employees on coffee estates will come out on strike'.<sup>35</sup> Weakened by dissension and with its finances in a poor state<sup>36</sup>, the Union seemed far from ready for such a showdown. Even so, the opposites were so irreconcilable that by the middle of June, Kariuki was still warning the K.C.G.A. that the Union would call a strike unless the Labour Commissioner and the K.F.L. intervened.<sup>37</sup> There were unrelenting pressures on the Union leadership to organise strike action though their instincts would hardly let them pass beyond brinkmanship.

### *The State Renews its Attacks on the Union*

The state was growing impatient with the Union bureaucracy and losing confidence in its ability to get its affairs in order and assert control over the members. Was it time to intervene? At the end of May, the Registrar using his powers under the Trade Union Ordinance relating to 'Inspection of

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<sup>32</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1961.

<sup>33</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, April 1961.

<sup>34</sup> E.A.S. 18 April 1961: 'Coffee Workers Discontented.'

<sup>35</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, April 1961.

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, May 1961.

<sup>37</sup> E.A.S. 17 June 1961: 'Coffee Strike Threat.'

Accounts', instructed the general secretary 'to bring all books of account, vouchers, receipts and receipt books....together with the register of members ... in order that I may inspect the same'.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, an inspection of the Nyeri Branch accounts revealed that local officials had not received the prescribed cash books, receipts and vouchers which had been made compulsory for all unions.<sup>39</sup> The investigator highlighted entries in the cash book relating to fines for traffic offences incurred by drivers during the course of union business. Once again, the Union's attention was drawn to the Trade Unions Ordinance<sup>40</sup> which prohibited the payment of fines from union funds other than those imposed on the union. The Union was ordered to recover these payments 'from the persons concerned'. The investigation further ascertained that expenditure on transport and travelling was 'particularly heavy' and advised 'immediate steps'<sup>41</sup> to reduce it.

Once again, allegations relating to the non-payment of wages brought by some of its officers against the Union during April became the favoured pretext for further interference. Kariuki was prosecuted again at the Resident Magistrate's Court in Thika on June 5th on four counts of non-payment of wages. He pleaded guilty on two of these counts and was fined 100/- or one months imprisonment 'in default of payment on each of the four counts' and ordered to pay alleged wage arrears of 1,450/-. This was followed by a similar case in Kiambu. Unable to meet these demands, Kariuki was summoned to court again on June 22nd, though he failed to appear and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Here was more confirmation of the Union's inability to meet its running costs. This had as much to do with the confidence of the members in their leadership as with the reliability of dues collectors and the corruption of Union officials. With so many immediate demands on their wages, it was becoming harder for workers to postpone their expectations which had been aroused by the elections. They saw the Union as a direct instrument to reach out and secure their immediate requirements, so that when it failed them on this score dues were withheld. There was also the continuing problem of police informers in the Union. Certainly the wage claimants were instrumental in contriving conditions where the state could intervene and close the organisation down. Shortly, the court broker in Thika shut down the Union's offices following the issue of 'attachment orders' against its property. The offices were later reopened after 'certain'<sup>42</sup> guarantees were received, though by this time there was not an item of furniture or office equipment left in

<sup>38</sup>K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: J.C. Knaggs/Registrar of Trade Unions to C.P.W.U. General Secretary, May 28th 1961.

<sup>39</sup> Trade Unions [Accounts] Regulations [1960].

<sup>40</sup> M.R.C./MSS/ 292/967.1/6: Trade Unions Ordinance Section 44 [1952].

<sup>41</sup>K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61:J.C. Knaggs / Registrar of Trade Unions to C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 12th June 1961.

<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./ VK/ 1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1961.

them. It seems that the K.F.L. gave the Union sufficient money to pay wage arrears and fines thus saving Kariuki from a prison sentence. Overall, the Union's financial affairs continued to be in a parlous state.

### *To Strike, or Not to Strike*

Meanwhile, a crisis was maturing relating to the supposedly abrogated agreement. Sufficiently intimidated, Kariuki now gave notice of his attachment to the January settlement by way of a complaint to I.R.Price, the K.C.G.A.'s Chief Executive and former Labour Commissioner to Malaya, of the organisation's 'delaying tactic methods' in making an 'amendment of the agreement'.<sup>43</sup> Kariuki gave the K.C.G.A. a seven day strike notice, but also invited the K.F.L. and the Labour Commissioner to intervene in the dispute, in the hope that a board of inquiry would save him from leading a struggle. Price made plain that the K.C.G.A. was 'not prepared to negotiate at all' on any amendments to the January agreement thus shutting the door on Kariuki who was desperate to go back to the members with an offering. Price further insisted that a strike could not take place until the S.J.C. had failed to reach a consensus and held the Union to the recognition agreement which required it to give 21 days notice. He also alleged that the union had acted 'unconstitutionally'<sup>44</sup> in deciding upon a strike unauthorised by a secret ballot of the membership. The Union duly capitulated and agreed to comply with the 21 day rule.

During June coffee picking reached its peak in many parts of the district without incident though some concern was expressed over the possible effects of the threatened strike action as the flush was maturing earlier than expected. There had been such 'a heavy supply' of pickers that 'many' estates had to turn back large numbers. The famine in the nearby reserves, due to a prolonged drought, had become serious enough to make earnings from coffee picking all the difference for many workers between eating or starving. The Labour Office was confident that neither 'industrial or political agitation' was likely to slow up or cause a stoppage of this seasonal supply of labour, making the Union's bargaining position far from strong. The strike threat was twice held in abeyance but was finally set for July 3rd. Still Union leaders vacillated and bellowed their hot air. The Labour Officer described their contradictory behaviour as 'irresponsible, casual, vacillating and incompetent'. Resolute in their irresoluteness, by the middle of June, 'the morale and status of union officials' was at its 'lowest ebb' since the founding of the Union. They were failing both to resuscitate a collapsed

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<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Kariuki to I.R. Price, K.C.G.A. Chief Executive, 15th June 1961.

<sup>44</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: I.R.Price, K.C.G.A. Chief Executive to C.P.W.U General Secretary, 24th June 1961.



agreement and in their pretence that this settlement had never really been abrogated and that they could 'obtain amendments' to make it acceptable to the members.

The desperate attempts by C.P.W.U. officials to extricate themselves from this crisis were riddled with contradiction. For, while 'constitutional methods' had been exhausted by way of achieving the sought amendments, the recourse to strike action, threatened but nevertheless dreaded, was now awaited by an impatient membership. Though famine and unemployment had weakened the Union's hand, given the membership's apparent willingness for a showdown, this was not an impossible situation for the organisation. Nonetheless, indecisiveness plagued the leadership with the low ebb of morale rooted in a paralysed reluctance to act. On the one hand, union leaders still maintained they were seeking amendments to an agreement they had previously abrogated and appealed to the employers to deduct the subs from workers wages to stave off the financial crisis embroiling them. On the other hand, the bureaucracy was faced with salvaging its credibility amongst the members by extracting some gains. These responses cancelled each other into paralysis and indecision. Workers were evidently growing more angry and impatient with the employers bidding down their commodity. The picking rate had fallen significantly from the previous season and, with the employers shrinking their work forces and rationalising production, Union members seemed to be straining at the leash to close ranks and organise a struggle. It was these circumstances that compelled the Union, on June 15th, to give the K.C.G.A. seven days notice of strike action. Far sighted employers had the measure of union officials and understood the histrionics at play. For, while Union leaders were appealing to the employers to assist them via the check off system, they were also rattling the sabre of strike action in their face. Without compulsory deductions, union leaders had to take care to be seen acting in their members interests. To obviate the risks involved, the employers were needed to deduct at source.

Once again, no sooner had the leadership thrown down the gauntlet than they were backtracking and wriggling to escape from their rhetorical commitment. Lubembe's intervention on behalf of the K.F.L. assuring its 'full support' appeared to strengthen the organisation, but a further retreat ensued. The strike notice was extended by another five days, signalling an even deeper lack of resolve. The Labour Officer observed that 'attempts to organise the strike by union officials have so far been of a rather casual nature, inclining one to thoughts that the officials have little faith themselves in their action.'<sup>45</sup> As late as June 26th Kariuki met with the Labour Department's Industrial Relations Officer Meschak Ndisi and confirmed his intention to call a general strike from

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<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1961.

July 3rd if the K.C.G.A. refused to discuss wages and conditions. Ndisi advised Kariuki to report the dispute under the terms of the Trades Dispute [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance. Here lay Kariuki's escape route in the prospect of a board of inquiry. Still he staggered about within the contradiction without going beyond its limits.

Ill at ease with Kariuki, Ndisi visited various estates around the district to measure the situation for himself, 'talking to workers and managers'. He found that 'employees were not in favour of going on strike' and, 'it appeared that many employees have lost confidence in Kariuki's leadership of the union.' Further prevarication ensued when Kariuki revealed that an executive meeting would be held at Ruiru on July 5th to 'decide as to whether strike action would be called...'.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile the members were becoming more restive and critical, and reluctant to take action without firm leadership. Why risk all in a struggle led by people who did not believe it could be won? Such was a recipe for demoralisation. In fact, by the end of the month there seemed 'little likelihood of widespread support for the strike from workers within the industry.'<sup>47</sup> Saddled with an unresolved crisis of leadership, enthusiasm amongst plantation workers was on the wane. At this point a way out seemed to be emerging for the demoralised bureaucracy. Would they risk a call for strike action half hoping that there would be no response, in order to claim that they could not proceed with the struggle because there was no support for it?

The opportune moments for a showdown were slipping away as coffee picking in the Makuyu, Mitubiri, Donyo Sabuk and Thika wards was now well past its peak, while only in Ruiru was extensive picking<sup>48</sup> still taking place. At a meeting in Thika on July 2nd, 'about' 400 C.P.W.U. members were addressed by Kariuki and Lubembe. Unless the employers agreed to bargain with the Union, they were told, it 'would call a strike'. Kariuki was then 'challenged by listeners' for having signed the present agreement, 'which was said not to be beneficial to workers'. Lubembe assured the assembled that the K.F.L. would provide financial aid if there was a strike.<sup>49</sup> The procrastination of the leadership over the intended strike seemed to be at an end when it 'made known the fact that it had decided to drop this matter'. At a meeting in Ruiru on July 23rd, with an attendance 'almost double of the previous one'<sup>50</sup>, both Lubembe and Kariuki 'made this clear' as they told the assembled that the proposed strike action had been cancelled. Lubembe told workers that the K.F.L. had

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, June 1961.

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1961.

<sup>48</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1961.

<sup>49</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, July 1961.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July 1961.

accepted a request from Kariuki to intervene in the dispute on condition that the strike notice was withdrawn pending the outcome<sup>51</sup> of discussions between K.F.L. and K.F.E. Still more writhing was evident as 'it was intimated that the question might be brought up again' if no progress was made.

The vacillations of previous weeks had wasted valuable time, weakened the resolve of the membership and undermined the Union's hand in forthcoming negotiations with the K.C.G.A. who knew that they would be dealing with an organisation in crisis. The game of brinkmanship tinged with the rhetoric of strike action had been verbalised by a layer that was congenitally inconsistent and unable to lead. They had got the Union no farther forward with its demands, indeed the opposite had occurred as the employers were strengthened by its dividedness. The Labour Office observed 'that the union officials concerned have not escaped entirely unscathed from the activities of the past few weeks, as there are signs of serious dissension amongst officials and dissatisfaction with the union's leadership.'<sup>52</sup> Paralysed at the prospect of having to mobilise their own members in a struggle with the owners, union leaders preferred to call not only on the good offices of the K.F.L. but also the F.K.E. to secure their case with the coffee growers. As a result 'the influence' of head office had 'dwindled to a state of almost complete ineffectiveness'. The union bureaucracy was drifting amidst its worst ever crisis leading a number of branch officials to take independent action under circumstances where the Union executive 'should have been consulted'. There were also rumours that some officials were planning to put Kariuki out of the leadership. Yet more allegations surfaced that head office officials were 'liberally disposing of union funds in a most improper manner'<sup>53</sup> along with more claims by Union staff that they had not been paid. One C.P.W.U. official reported Kariuki to the Labour Department for 'misappropriating the Union's fund by means which are not concerned with the Union'. The department advised that the matter be reported to the executive committee, though it had not met 'on any occasion in the past few months...'.<sup>54</sup> The prospect of a further state attack now overshadowed the organisation.

### *Plantation Struggles in Kiambu and Thika*<sup>55</sup>

Whilst Union leaders wavered and allowed the organisation to drift, strikes in Kiambu and Thika continued though under the most difficult conditions. For most of the year, a widespread famine and

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<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July 1961.

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1961.

<sup>53</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, August 1961.

<sup>54</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, August 1961.

<sup>55</sup> See appendices 13, 14 and 15 giving details of coffee strikes and other disputes in Thika and Kiambu during 1961.

drought was in evidence and many estates were forced to discharge large numbers of workers. In Kiambu the situation was 'grave'<sup>56</sup>. Typically, Kianzabe Estate in Donyo Sabuk was faced with losing most of its coffee crop estimated at £150,000 because the rains had failed<sup>57</sup>, forcing it to make forty workers redundant and lay off a further 190 during March. Despite the persistence of widespread unemployment, returns from the labour exchanges in both districts revealed a trend by work seekers to exercise choices about the type of labour they were prepared to accept. Even with a sharp rise in the number of unemployed, an order for 25 labourers from the Thika Labour Exchange to work on the Yatta Furrow, a project for a dug 35 mile ravine, for a period of 10-20 days at a daily rate of 2/- plus housing, failed to attract more than 10 applicants.<sup>58</sup> Returns from the district's labour exchanges during April indicated that 'over the past few months', the total number of discharges in the rural locations had been consistently in excess<sup>59</sup> of the number of engagements. During May the demand for labour continued to be negligible, a trend attributed to 'the near complete failure of any substantial rainfall in most parts of this district'.<sup>60</sup> Once again, it is noteworthy that despite serious unemployment work seekers, 'especially those in the unskilled category', often showed a marked degree of selectivity in the type of work they were prepared to accept. Furthermore, there was a significant trend of rejection where vacancies involved work 'of an unusually heavy nature' or with an 'allegedly unpopular employer'.<sup>61</sup> These were hardly the choices of broken people. The widespread and almost continuous rain throughout November whilst ending the drought, posed yet further dangers to the coffee crop. Many estates were unable to get their coffee dried and rain slowed down the supply of pickers under conditions where berries were quickly ripening. There were some appearances of this crisis at the Nairobi coffee auctions where a shortage of coffee for sale was evidenced. Prices rose immediately as a result, from an average of 344/- to 385/- a cwt., with class 6 coffee rising to 311/- a cwt.<sup>62</sup> By the middle of December, the 1961 average sale price had reached 403 /- a cwt. with class 6 at 313/-.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> K.N.A./MC/1/3: Confidential Circular from O.J.Mason / Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Labour Officers in Thika, Kiambu, Nyeri and Nanyuki, February 14th, 1961.

<sup>57</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, March 1961.

<sup>58</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, January 1961; The number of work seekers rose from 183 to 518 during December 1960.

<sup>59</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1961.

<sup>60</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, May 1961.

<sup>61</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, July 1961.

<sup>62</sup> E.A.S. 15 November 1961: 'Coffee Auction.'

E.A.S. 29 November 1961: 'Shortage of Coffee.'

E.A.S. 6 December 1961: 'Coffee Sale.'

<sup>63</sup> E.A.S. 13 December 1961: 'Coffee Sales.'

Given these circumstances, the persistence of industrial action on Kiambu's coffee estates throughout the year was remarkable. In mid January, an important dispute occurred at Kasarani estate where 408 men and women, working in both the field and in the estate's processing factory went on strike in opposition to the January agreement which had increased their working day from six to seven hours, starting at 7 a.m. and finishing at 2 p.m. They also insisted that their weeding task be reduced from 150 to 80 trees, a demand that was taken up by other workers in the district. Union officials refused to support the strike and told workers that they considered the weeding task and the increased hours 'reasonable'.<sup>64</sup> They then ordered their members back to work.

Once again, the C.P.W.U. 'did not initiate or support the strike'<sup>65</sup> at Kimarauli Estate, where 68 strikers came out on February 27th over the discharge of 28 workers due to the drought. Amongst those made redundant were estate committee members including Kuria Ngugi, an active part time local official of the Union. After meeting the estate directors, Kariuki 'was prepared, albeit reluctantly, to accept these discharges', but 'insisted'<sup>66</sup> on Ngugi's reinstatement, a demand the management refused to accept. Nonetheless, the strike continued well into the following month. Following a threatened 'lock out' at the company's two estates in Thika if the strike was not resolved,<sup>67</sup> Apollo Owiti intervened on behalf of the K.F.L. and advised the Union that they could not 'reasonably expect'<sup>68</sup> their demands to be acceded to and on March 22nd secured a return to work.<sup>69</sup>

More opposition to the January agreement came at Ibonia Estate, again in Kiambu, where 150 workers came out on May 2nd in support of a demand for an annual bonus. Apparently, the manager had informed workers the previous May that because of their refusal to complete 'a satisfactory' picking task, no bonus would be paid for 1960-1. Apparently, the January settlement did not provide for payment of bonuses and the Union had 'been informed' by the K.C.G.A. that it had advised growers 'not to pay bonuses in future'.<sup>70</sup> Even though the C.P.W.U. had not initiated the strike and refused to make it official, the Labour Office 'was particularly anxious'<sup>71</sup> that Kariuki should bring about a resumption of work before the magistrate took action under the Resident Labourer's

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<sup>64</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/206: LD 98 Strike Reports, 1961.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: Labour Officer/Kiambu to Labour Commissioner, 1 March 1961.

<sup>67</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: Thika Labour Officer to A.M.Mountzis, 22 March 1961.

<sup>68</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/206: L.D.98 Strike Reports, 1961.

<sup>69</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: Thika Labour Officer to Senior Labour Officer / Central Province, 23 March 1961.

<sup>70</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: W.M.P. Heath-Saunders / Labour Officer/ Kiambu to Labour Commissioner, 4 May 1961.

<sup>71</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/206: L.D.98 Strike Reports, 1961.

Ordinance to evict the strikers from the estate. Though he was reluctant to visit the strikers without the employer's permission to be on the estate, this was almost certainly a tact to avoid a confrontation given their anger at being sold short by the Union over bonus payments. When Kariuki eventually visited the farm in company with a K.C.G.A. official, he failed to persuade the strikers to return.<sup>72</sup>

The Union's refusal to support its members seems to have given the green light for an attack on the agitators active amongst the workforce. The situation at the estate was reviewed during the course of a meeting between the District Commissioner, the Superintendent of Police and the Labour Officer on May 8th, where it was decided 'that one of the ring leaders who persisted in holding unauthorised meetings with the labour should be paid his due wages and ordered to leave the farm, and if he refused to comply he would be arrested by the police under section 4 of the Trespass Ordinance.' When the worker refused to accept his pay and 'truculently' declined to leave the estate, the police arrested and charged him. Meanwhile, the employer requested assistance from the Labour Office to secure fifty 'replacement' workers. As the Union mounted no defence of the sacked agitator, nor resistance to the 'alternative' workforce, 'some' workers approached the manager 'individually' to ask for their jobs back. By May 11th most of the strikers had drifted back to work apart from twenty who were given their discharge.<sup>73</sup>

By September conditions in both districts had eased somewhat and at the end of the month an unexpected surge forward began which continued more or less unabated until the end of the year. Once again a pivotal role was played by industrial workers in lifting those on the plantations to their feet, most notably at the Bata Shoe factory in Limuru where nearly a thousand shoe operators stayed out for almost all of October over a demand for union recognition which was won from the company. This was a major battle which undoubtedly stirred the area and helped to raise the morale for struggle on the coffee estates at a time when the employers were at their most vulnerable with the coffee crop exposed to heavy rains. The reciprocal impacts between strikes over pay and union recognition in Thika's Industrial Area and disputes on the surrounding plantations were no less significant. These occurred successively during each quarter of the year at K.E.M.E. Ltd., Metal Box, Bulleys Tanneries and Nath Brothers.

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<sup>72</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/206: L.D.98 Strike Reports, 1961.

<sup>73</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: W.M.P. Heath-Saunders / Labour Officer/ Kiambu to Labour Commissioner, 11 May 1961.

Despite the problems with their leaders, workers continued to take action and call on the Union to serve them. This was particularly evident in Makuyu where several strikes in early September were 'symptomatic of fairly widespread unrest which has been in evidence in this particular area'.<sup>74</sup> Workers at Makuyu Coffee Plantation 'called an illegal strike'<sup>75</sup> involving 160 union members to demand reinstatement of a worker sacked for convening 'unauthorised meetings'. Mbugua was a leading member of the estate committee and was 'also known to be an agitator in the political sphere', actually a K.A.N.U. Youth organiser. According to the Labour Office, the origin of the strike was 'obscured by motives arising out of political agitation'<sup>76</sup> by ex-detainees employed on the estate. The strikers rejected Labour Office advice to go back to work while their grievances were being investigated. Initially, the C.P.W.U. was 'not concerned' with the strike but after strikers had rebuffed the approaches of the Labour Office, it 'advised' them to go back 'pending' negotiations between the Union, the K.C.G.A. and the Labour Department, though no return was effected. The Labour Inspector accompanied by a Union official visited strikers again on September 13th in a further attempt to entice them back, 'but they were adamant not to accept the advice'. Thika branch secretary James Wachira met the strikers the following day and 'after a long talk', they agreed to return after three days on strike. Irrepressible, they were out again within two days and only returned after Wachira arrived to 'personally conduct them' back to work. Arrangements were made to convene the District Joint Committee to discuss the demand for reinstatement, but the employers representatives failed to turn up. Wachira embraced this contempt and 'agreed' that no further action 'appeared to be necessary'<sup>77</sup>, and was reluctant thereafter to press for any settlement. The dispute received considerable attention in the district, enough for British representatives from the International Agricultural Workers Union to meet with workers and question them about their treatment.

The uneven occurrences of the strike movement combined to reach a climax on November 20th-21st, when most of the principal estates in the Kiambu locations of Rosslyn and Kabete struck simultaneously against the terms of the January agreement<sup>78</sup>. The strikers focused the grievances of coffee pickers everywhere as they raised the recurrent demand for a reduction in the daily picking task from three to two debes along with a 10/- increment. The tinder was lit at Hillcrest estate after the manager discharged seven women coffee pickers. This decision was made allegedly in ignorance

<sup>74</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/206: L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1961.

<sup>75</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, September 1961.

<sup>76</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/206: L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1961.

<sup>77</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, September 1961.

<sup>78</sup> See Appendix 14: Coffee Strikes in Kiambu, 1961.

of the women's 'permanent' status in the work force, which entitled them to one month's notice. When the estate's workers came out in sympathy on November 20th, the manager agreed to reinstate the women but the Union's organising secretary in Kabete, Rufus Karanja refused to call for a return to work and seized the moment to demand a reduction in the daily picking task from three to two debes. He contested the three debes task as provided for in the January agreement and argued that workers were due a 10/- increase prior to the agreement having been signed. The Senior Labour Officer noted that Karanja was 'just looking for trouble' as 'he had insisted on the labour remaining on strike' despite the women's reinstatement. Apparently the K.F.L. 'severely criticised' Karanja and 'indicated' to the Labour Office that it 'would do its best to remove the man as soon as possible'.<sup>79</sup>

Karanja then called out other estates in the area on November 21st in support of the two debe picking task. Five hundred monthly and ticket workers responded to the strike along with 250 casual pickers at Hawkins, Buku, Nyari, Kihingo, Tigiri and Crossroads estates. At a strike meeting on November 22nd Kariuki, again accompanied by a K.C.G.A. representative, 'endeavoured to persuade the strikers to resume work,' but 'was only able to utter a few words before he was shouted down, and fearful of the crowds militant attitude beat a hasty retreat'.<sup>80</sup> Apparently, workers had submitted their demands 'with the active support' of Karanja, but 'the situation had got out of the control' of the Kabete union official.<sup>81</sup> The Labour Department's concern was aroused at the strike's challenge to the joint negotiating and disputes procedure for the industry<sup>82</sup>, and called on the K.F.L. to restore the situation.<sup>83</sup> The K.F.L.'s deputy general secretary addressed the strikers assembled at the C.P.W.U.'s Kabete office and promised to raise their complaints with the K.C.G.A. if they returned to work. A meeting with the employers was then scheduled to review the causes of the strike.<sup>84</sup> By November 24th, workers at all seven estates had gone back.

The struggle reffared at Hawkins Estate in Rosslyn, shortly joined by Mabroukie Coffee Estate in Limuru. In both instances workers repeated demands for a return to the two debes picking task against the continuing widespread insistence by the owners on a standard task of three debes. Though

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<sup>79</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: Senior Labour Officer's filenotes, 21 and 22 November 1961.

<sup>80</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/204: W.M.P. Heath-Saunders/ Labour Officer/ Kiambu to Labour Commissioner, 22 November 1961.

<sup>81</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/204: W.M.P. Heath-Saunders/ Labour Officer/ Kiambu to Labour Commissioner, 24 November 1961.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*



work resumed at Hawkins estate on November 24th, the issues here and elsewhere were far from resolved, evidenced by the failure of work forces throughout the area to complete the set task of three debes. When workers were instructed to finish their task, they refused and came out on strike again the following day. At a meeting between the estate owner J.R. Ballard and K.C.G.A. officials, the latter were mindful of the strike's potential to re-ignite the struggle on other estates and advised a climb down. They 'suggested that a three debe task should not be insisted upon', since 'every grower's principal aim was to get their coffee off the trees' regardless of whether a three or two debe task was picked. Ballard refused to accept this position protesting an 'abrogation of principle, which could well lead to the Union persuading its members to disregard other clauses in the agreement'.

Ballard had determined that his permanent workers should be 'taught a lesson' and all 97 of the estate's workers were discharged on November 28th. He then enlisted a hundred casual pickers in the hope that some of the dismissed workers would ask for their jobs back, though only four subsequently re-applied.<sup>85</sup> They preferred to remain sacked rather than go back on Ballard's terms. Whilst there was 'no reaction' from the C.P.W.U. nor the K.F.L. regarding the dismissals, the Labour Office promised to keep the Labour Commissioner informed of 'developments in this "trial of strength" as it could well spark off sympathetic industrial action in Kabete and possibly elsewhere.'<sup>86</sup> These struggles were the tinder for those to come over the picking rate and standard task in the following season. They revealed that whatever problems there were with the Union bureaucracy and the vagaries of the labour market, the indignation of plantation workers had strong material roots which led them to take action despite their poor leadership.

### *The C.P.W.U. De-registered*

In contrast to the resurgence amongst the members, the Union's bureaucracy 'bickered, vacillated and generally remained in the background'. This was the subjective behaviour of a machinery 'completely devoid of any sign of life or service to the members'.<sup>87</sup> Demoralised and out of touch, it was caught unawares by the stirrings beneath it. It was the spectre of a serious confrontation on the horizon, with coffee workers taking action in spite of their leadership, that prompted the Registrar to take draconian action against the Union. The interests of 'capital as a whole' beckoned, with issues at stake much greater than any single planter. The Registrar served notice on October 5th of his

<sup>85</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/204: W.M.P. Heath-Saunders/ Labour Officer/ Kiambu to Labour Commissioner, 29 November 1961.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, November 1961.

intention to de-register the Union, giving it two months 'to show cause' why it should not have its registration cancelled. The Registrar alleged that the Union 'had wilfully and after notice' contravened both the provisions of the Trade Union Ordinance<sup>88</sup>, by using its funds for 'unauthorised purposes'<sup>89</sup>, and the Trade Union [Accounts] Regulations [1960], in failing to remit its annual membership and accounts returns.

This was followed by a visit from the Labour Inspector to the Union's offices to investigate further claims concerning the non-payment of wages made by some of its officials. The Union was subsequently ordered to pay all its wage arrears before November 7th or face prosecution under the Employment Ordinance<sup>90</sup> 'in respect of the offence of non-payment of wages'.<sup>91</sup> This followed convictions for the same offence earlier in the year. The Union was unable to meet these demands and Kariuki was 'personally fined'<sup>92</sup> 750/- and ordered to pay 5,047/- in arrears. There was also a related offence for paying wages below those specified in a wages regulation order for Thika's urban district, under the terms of the Regulation of Wages and Conditions Ordinance [1951],<sup>93</sup> for which Kariuki was further convicted and fined a 400/-, and ordered to pay 325/- in arrears. This latter charge was also aimed to discredit trade unionism generally. How could the C.P.W.U. possibly stand-up and secure improved wages and conditions for its members when it was paying below the minimum itself? Unable to meet these costs, Kariuki was sentenced to five months in prison. His defence was that the Union had no means to pay the wages demanded 'because its income was less than its expenditure'.<sup>94</sup> This legal onslaught seemed to have the intent of suppressing the Union entirely, beyond any obvious means of recovery.

In early December, the Union was 'struck off' by the Registrar on the grounds that its funds had been expended in an unlawful manner.<sup>95</sup> Its branch offices in Thika and Kiambu were then closed down. All remaining Union property was requisitioned as were its outstanding funds in various bank accounts. At least on paper, the Union had now 'ceased to exist'. By the end of the month all the

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<sup>88</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trades Union Ordinance, Section 47[i] [1952].

<sup>89</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24: J.G. Knaggs/ Registrar of Trade Unions to the Labour Commissioner, 10th October, 1961 and K.N.A./VK/1/32: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, October 1961.

<sup>90</sup> Employment Ordinance, Section 72[1] [a].

<sup>91</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: C.C.G.Glaysher/Thika Labour Officer to C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 24 October 1961.

<sup>92</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, December 1961.

<sup>93</sup> Regulation of Wages and Conditions Ordinance, Section 12[2].

<sup>94</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/24/ C.P.W.U. 1959-61: Judgement in the Case of Crown versus the C.P.W.U., Nyeri Labour Office, 23 December 1961.

<sup>95</sup> E.A.S. 14 October 1961: 'Coffee Union's Appeal.'

Union's officials, with the exception of Kariuki, 'had disappeared from the district.' The instincts of an apparatus that prized its self preservation above the needs of the members had gained the upper hand. Despite distinct signs of recovery from recent setbacks, opportunities to rally the members in face of this legal onslaught were evaded. Only the perfidy of the Union's bureaucracy prevented this by offering the organisation on a plate to the Registrar. Nonetheless, the main problem for the government and the employers was far from resolved. The demoralisation and despondency that had rent the union bureaucracy was far from predominant amongst plantation workers themselves. After making an application for registration of a new union for coffee and sisal workers, the K.F.L. nominated its 'director of organisation' Fred Kubai to attempt a salvage operation. Initially, this was to take place through a series of public meetings, starting off in Ruiru. Despite the afternoon rain, 150 workers turned out to a meeting at Kerigiti Stadium in Kiambu on December 30th to hear Kubai address them on the need for a new coffee workers union and was 'well received by the crowd'.<sup>96</sup> For the time being though workers grievances were to be taken up by the local branches of K.A.N.U.

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<sup>96</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, December 1961.

## 8. *The S.C.P.W.U. : One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*

### *Emergence of the Combined Union*

When the semblance of a new organisation began to emerge in the form of a combined union for both coffee and sisal workers it provoked a fierce resistance. The K.C.G.A. were 'not prepared to accept a joint union' and its members were 'instructed to have nothing to do with it'<sup>1</sup>. Facilities for estate meetings were withdrawn everywhere. When the prospect of a new type of union seemed irreversible, the K.C.G.A. sought to ensure that it was moulded on its terms. The collusion of the K.F.L. at this decisive juncture deserves special attention, since it reveals the political direction in which they were headed at a critical moment during the transition to independence.

The Sisal and Coffee Plantation Workers' Union [S.C.P.W.U.] was registered as a probationary trade union on February 14th 1962, though its full registration was dependent on the dissolution of the S.P.W.U. The initial recruitment meetings, whilst well attended, met a wall of scepticism from amongst workers themselves with express concern over the whereabouts of money collected by former C.P.W.U. officials. The appeal by K.F.L. officials to "forget the past"<sup>2</sup> seems to have fallen on deaf ears as few workers came forward to join. On February 24th there were some signs of a turnaround as 400 workers came to hear Fred Kubai and Clement Lubembe speak again at the Kerigiti stadium where promises were given of efforts to bring about an increase in coffee workers wages. By mid April, the Union had gained 'considerable support', particularly in the Kiambu and Ruiru areas where the reported membership was 'nearing' a thousand and expected to double within a 'few weeks'.<sup>3</sup> This seems a remarkable achievement given that the Union had no access rights to visit workers on the estates. What stands out about this recruitment was that, even with their scepticism, workers turned to the S.C.P.W.U. far more than the Union was able or willing to turn to them.

A new layer of officials were put in place to take the leadership of the new Union. Amongst the newly appointed were Stephen Ngobe as full time district organiser for Kiambu and Babu Kamau for Ruiru. Despite the appearances of unity though, the new leadership was riven with factionalism between Kikuyu officials from the disbanded C.P.W.U. and Luos from the S.P.W.U. led by Apollo Owiti, the Union's new general secretary. The new officials, mostly Kikuyus, had been appointed by

<sup>1</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: Senior Labour Officer's Report/Nyeri, 26 February 1962.

<sup>2</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, February 1962.

<sup>3</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1962.

the K.F.L. on Kubai's instructions while Owiti was away in Kericho. Owiti and the K.F.L. 'were not of one accord' over the new appointments, which had been 'made without his authority'<sup>4</sup>, and he proceeded to line up his own candidates. Kiambu's Labour Officer, W.M.P. Heath-Saunders, intervened to lend his support to Owiti and refused to discuss Union matters with Ngobe 'until I was satisfied he was a bona fide Union official'. He also advised the district commissioner to refuse Union applications for licences to collect funds or hold public meetings without a 'letter of authority from Mr Owiti.' Ngobe was subsequently called to a meeting with Owiti and Heath-Saunders and was made aware 'in no uncertain terms', that only Owiti 'would decide who should represent the Union' and that the K.F.L. 'were quite improper in making such appointments'. The collaboration between Owiti and the Labour Department at this crucial juncture was set to continue, as Heath-Saunders told the province's senior labour officer that 'in the meantime, Owiti and I will maintain close contact over the appointment of Union officials and any developments concerning the Union which may take place in this district'.

This issue was further complicated as the problem of rogue errant organisers raised its head. In one instance, Heath-Saunders demanded that Ngobe put an immediate end to the activities of Ralph Karioki, who had been organising workers meetings on the estates 'without any authority whatsoever'. Ngobe was apparently 'anxious to cooperate'<sup>5</sup> in the matter. Restraining the spontaneity of the members and isolating potential agitators was the acid test of the new leadership in the eyes of the employers and the Labour Department. This was to become an enduring problem and even as late as August, the continuing incidence of rogue-errant 'officials' in the Thika area prompted the district commissioner to write to Owiti to remind him that only those on the submitted list of elected officials would be dealt with. A layer of agitators and errant 'officials', taking matters into their own hands without organising 'credentials'<sup>6</sup>, revealed the shadow of alternative leadership that was to continually brush up against the official bureaucracy of the Union. Owiti was chaperoned by Heath-Saunders to a meeting with I.R.Price, to reassure the K.C.G.A. against the emergence of an unpredictable leadership, and of efforts to stabilise the union bureaucracy under his control. This was not enough for the K.C.G.A., who stood firm in their refusal to grant access and recognition to the

<sup>4</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30:Kiambu Labour Officer/W.M.P.Heath-Saunders to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 22 February 1962.

<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30:Kiambu Labour Officer/W.M.P.Heath-Saunders to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 22 February 1962.

<sup>6</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: C.H. Malavu/ Acting Senior Labour Officer/Central Province to Labour Officer/Thika, 13 August 1962.

new union on the grounds that its officials were K.A.N.U. activists and had never worked in the coffee industry.<sup>7</sup>

### *The K.F.L.'s Corporatist Amalgamation*

Following his objection to K.F.L. appointees and by way of a reaction to the K.C.G.A.'s intransigence, Owiti performed a 180 degree turn. He told the employers' association that Ngobe and Kamau would 'start their work immediately'. Bending to the K.F.L. pressure, Owiti believed the new union 'would last approximately a year' by which time 'he expected an omnibus Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union to be formed'.<sup>8</sup> His relenting over the question of new appointments suggests that the K.F.L. was asserting its sway over the S.C.P.W.U. in opposition to Owiti's aim to make the Union into something of a personal fiefdom. Having established its control, the K.F.L. apparently planned to steer the new organisation into further amalgamation, imposing one union for all workers on the land. Such a omnibus had the attraction of making it easier to control the members. Its administration could also be streamlined and made more hierarchical, making the Union cheaper to run and easier to incorporate into the state apparatus.

However, there were considerable hazards involved in such a move. For whilst in appearance it offered the prospect of tighter control over plantation and agricultural labour by reducing the perils of spontaneous militancy and the potential of localised conflicts to spread, the advent of a single union also risked promoting larger and more widespread struggles. So that a move designed to centralise the K.F.L.'s control over the organised working class would also concentrate the dangers involved. This coincided with Mboya's entry on April 7th into the K.A.N.U./K.A.D.U. coalition as Minister of Labour, when a more political role was prescribed for the K.F.L. Much closer to the state than before, and elevated by its role as junior partner to the national bourgeoisie, it was intervening more frequently into the affairs of its affiliates. Though masked by tribal 'fitina', this was what lay at the source of the initial conflict between Owiti and the K.F.L. Whilst able to adjust itself in hindsight, the 'old' Labour Department was to some extent left behind by these developments.

The prospect of a united plantation union taking in workers on both coffee and sisal estates appeared as a rupture with the short tradition of industrial unionism, which prescribed a single union for each industry. Far from being determined by principle, the K.F.L.'s strategy was governed by

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<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: I.R. Price, K.C.G.A. Chief Executive to Senior Labour Officer, 23 February 1962.

<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: Kiambu Labour Officer/ W.M.P. Heath-Saunders to Senior Labour Officer/Central Province, 2 March 1962.

pragmatism and bureaucratic expediency. The labour bureaucracy were generally driven by their need to use the 'membership' to bargain for their own privileges and fiefdoms as well as delivering enough benefits to maintain their cloak of credibility. Within this was also contained the limits to Mboya's role and what he was able to do as ex-trade unionist turned Minister of Labour. He became pivotal to the changing requirements of the state in transforming the unions into outright transmission belts for its authority over the organised labour movement. This emergent aim had the force of necessity in its thrust to exert a level of discipline over the trade unions more draconian than ever the state had dared to impose prior to independence. Its dénouement came over the ensuing months as the straitjacket of the Industrial Relations Charter and its offspring the Industrial Court were tailored. There were however, limits to this process. Whatever their subjective inclinations, union leaders were unable to go all the way with Mboya, since they were riding a tiger and could offer no real guarantee of being able to control it. Abject capitulation over the recognition issue would not only put their jobs at risk but also their control over the developing social movement beneath them.

Once again, the K.F.L.'s support for amalgamation, far from promoting working class unity, was a decided move towards a more centralised trade union movement with the reins of power firmly in its grip.<sup>9</sup> According to Thika's Labour Office, the recent activities of the federation had caused 'great anxiety' in the district. Local K.F.L. officials had taken it upon themselves to interfere in disputes 'immediately they occur'<sup>10</sup> in order to usurp negotiations away from the officials of the union concerned. This role was marked in the disputes at Nath Brothers in Thika and at the Bata Shoe Company in Limuru which had been forcefully channelled into joint disputes commissions. Similarly, a dispute between the K.L.G.W.U. and the Nairobi County and Thika Urban District Councils<sup>11</sup>, had again witnessed the K.F.L. taking the issues away from the union and placing them in the hands of a board of inquiry. These instances were part of a trend for local K.F.L. officials to sideline affiliates and negotiate without their consent. These instances showed that an amalgamated plantation union on the K.F.L.'s terms would be an instrument to disable an all out strike not to facilitate one.

Uncertainties over the K.F.L.'s new role and the trajectory of its relationship with the African bourgeoisie generally, aroused considerable suspicion amongst employers. In reaction to the new union, the F.K.E. threw its weight into the scales and advised the K.C.G.A. to withhold recognition until the K.F.L. had clarified its position regarding 'the question of safeguards' in the combined

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<sup>9</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/138/ K.F.L., 1962-4.

<sup>10</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, April 1962.

<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/15: L.D. 98 Strike Reports 1962.

union's constitution. The F.K.E. was particularly irate that the K.F.L. appeared to be abandoning 'a previous tacit undertaking' between them, that plantation and agricultural workers would be organised 'on an industrial basis'. Similarly, the K.C.G.A. were concerned to cast the basis for recognition by ensuring that existent sectionalism<sup>12</sup> would remain untampered with and that workers in the plantation and agricultural sector would continue to be organised according to the 1957 agreement between F.K.E. and the K.F.L. providing, inter alia, for the establishment of industrial unions.

The K.C.G.A.'s aim in refusing recognition and access, apart from disabling recruitment and fund raising rights to S.C.P.W.U. officials and collectors, was also to use the Union's vulnerable transition to break up any continuity with previous agreements. The K.C.G.A. stance provoked a groundswell of indignation amongst union members, prompting Owiti to give them fourteen days notice from April 5th to grant recognition and access or else face 'explosive action by this Union'.<sup>13</sup> The K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, I.R.Price, drew Owiti's attention to the K.F.L. statement of June 1959 which announced its authority for the formation of agricultural unions 'on an industry basis', and that at 'no subsequent time has the K.F.L. informed the F.K.E. of any change in its attitude.' Price emphasised that the S.C.P.W.U. was a probationary trade union and that the question of 'adequate safeguards' for the sisal and coffee industries was at a premium.<sup>14</sup>

### *Amalgamation Reinstates Sectionalism*

Increased tensions between the contending parties prompted Mboya's intervention into the dispute on April 17th. He told a meeting of Union representatives with Fred Kubai and the Labour Commissioner, Ian Husband, that he 'was concerned' that the Union should be given 'immediate recognition' and that the employers would only grant this if the S.C.P.W.U. agreed to operate as two sections for the purpose of discussing terms and conditions of service, whilst remaining as a single unit of administration. Such an agreement would be conditional on an assurance from the Union that a dispute in one section would not automatically affect the other. Mboya gave examples of similar arrangements in the tobacco, brewing and bottling industries, and in the distributive and food

<sup>12</sup> Clayton and Savage, p.325. Under the Trade Union Registration Ordinance [1949], the Registrar had the power to refuse registration if a union represented more than one trade without 'suitable provision for the protection and promotion of their respective sectional interests.' This was devised to suppress the general unionism that had emerged in the thirties and came to ahead with the emergence of the A.W.F. and the E.A.T.U.C.

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123:Owiti to the K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, 5 April 1962.

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123:I.R.Price to the S.P.W.U. General Secretary regarding 'Recognition and Access Agreements', 10 April 1962.



processing trades, where disputes were dealt with by sectional negotiating committees while only 'major differences' were referred to a central joint industrial council covering related industries. While the Union raised the spectre of problems arising where an employer was both a coffee and a sisal grower, it nonetheless found 'the conditions were acceptable'.<sup>15</sup> In return, Mboya agreed 'to look into' the complaint made by the Union regarding trespass laws and the obstacles these placed in the way of its officials and collectors visiting and recruiting members on the estates.

Cajoled by the former K.F.L. general secretary, a draft recognition agreement with the required retreats and concessions was quickly prepared by the Union. This incorporated an assurance regarding the 'intimidation' of non-unionists and recalcitrants generally. As under the previous C.P.W.U. recognition agreement, the Union accepted that workers 'who exercise confidential, directive and representative functions', such as headmen and supervisors, would automatically be excluded from membership. The new agreement was more draconian than before and involved the Union's consent to an exhaustive list of 'essential workers' who would have to forego their right to strike. This involved virtually every other worker apart from those involved in the direct production of coffee and sisal. The Union accepted that terms and conditions of employment would be negotiated with the coffee planters as before in a standing joint council whose deliberations would be kept 'entirely separate'<sup>16</sup> from any negotiations with the sisal growers. The Union further conceded that there would be no resort to strikes unless the Standing Joint Council failed to reach agreement. In this instance, fourteen days notice of a strike or lockout would be given in writing by one party to the other. Would all this be enough to secure the employers in their dealings with the Union?

The K.C.G.A. were still uneasy about trade disputes spreading from one industry to the other. Mboya reassured David Richmond, the F.K.E.'s Executive Officer, that he had procured the Union's agreement that any conflict arising in either the coffee or the sisal industry would 'not be extended to or automatically involve the other industry'. It later transpired that whatever verbal formulas had passed between Mboya and the S.C.P.W.U., the Minister of Labour's proposed amendments to the Union's draft rules and constitution were most likely rejected. The Union put its position afterwards that the K.F.L. had 'irrevocably decided' to organise sisal and coffee workers into one union and that they would 'not entertain employer interference in the administrative structure of the new Union.' Mboya was helpless on this issue and remarked to Richmond, 'I can see no way around this...'. He

<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Note of Meeting between Minister of Labour and S.C.P.W.U. officials, Labour Officer / Industrial Relations, 17 April 1962.

<sup>16</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Proposed Recognition Agreement between the K.C.G.A. and the S.C.P.W.U. , 19 April 1962.

put the ball in Richmond's court and urged that a recognition agreement be completed 'at the earliest moment'<sup>17</sup>, since neither the Ministry nor the country could afford 'any kind of industrial disturbance in the coffee industry'.<sup>18</sup>

Mboya's new tact was to lean more heavily on his lieutenants within the K.F.L. leadership. Peter Kibisu, the K.F.L. general secretary, attempted to assuage employers' anxieties by underwriting the guarantees they wanted with assurances that the K.F.L. would oversee and police such pledges. Kibisu made clear to the F.K.E. that while the coffee and sisal sections of the S.C.P.W.U. would work together 'in all respects', the actual terms of employment would be negotiated separately and that in the event of a dispute in one industry, the other would not automatically be affected. Furthermore, any extension of a dispute from one industry to the other would not be made 'without due cause'.<sup>19</sup> There was to be no recourse to the membership over this issue, no special conference of the Union called for the members to decide whether or not they wanted their constitution altered.

Kibisu's assurances were considered by the F.K.E. Rural Employers Committee which continued its preoccupation with the 1959 understanding between the F.K.E. and the K.F.L. regarding separate unions for tea, coffee, sisal, sugar, and general agriculture. At that time the F.K.E. had expressed 'the appreciation' of its rural affiliates that the K.F.L. 'had abandoned the idea' of an omnibus plantation union and 'thanked them for the line taken by them'.<sup>20</sup> Three years later the F.K.E., anxious at the political implications of amalgamation, were unable to let go of this compact. As Kibisu advanced proposals for amalgamation of various unions in the National Joint Consultative Council, he maintained that the K.F.L. was unable to trace any undertaking that the unions 'in these areas will remain forever without any structural changes'. He also insisted that the K.F.L. 'alone can and will decide upon the type of union as may be deemed appropriate to its organisational interests' and upheld its right, 'like the F.K.E.'<sup>21</sup>, to determine its internal affairs, a position he claimed was supported by the Trade Union Ordinance.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: T.J. Mboya to David Richmond / F.K.E Executive Officer, 26 April 1962.

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Mboya to Richmond, 7 May 1962.

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: P.F. Kibisu/ Acting General Secretary of K.F.L. to F.K.E Executive Officer, 9 May 1962.

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Minutes of a meeting between representatives of the F.K.E. Standing Commission of Rural Employers and the K.F.L. held at the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce, 25 June 1959.

<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/123: P.F. Kibisu/ Acting General Secretary of K.F.L. to F.K.E Executive Officer, 9 May 1962.

<sup>22</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, section 32 [1952].

In contrast to the F.K.E., the Labour Department and the Registrar were more assured by the benefits of restructuring, provided that the draft rules and constitution for the S.C.P.W.U. contained sectional arrangements to comply with the Trade Unions Ordinance.<sup>23</sup> The 'model' constitution included a clause on negotiating committees one each for coffee and sisal, which would both include the President and General Secretary, that specified their task 'to protect sectional interests..'. This amendment had been written by R.A.J.Damerell and H.T.Pryor, the Registrar of Trade Unions, who thought that these provisions 'may partially' meet the employers requirements but were prepared to devise further protection 'in any recognition agreements which may ensue'. Though Damerell called in Owiti and 'persuaded him' to meet the Registrar's stipulations, the Labour Commissioner was surprised by the extent of his capitulation, commenting that Owiti 'has gone further and scrapped his draft' in preference for the 'model constitution'.<sup>24</sup> His surrender on this score served to reinstate the sectionalism desired by the employers, making it easier to deal with the Union on an industry by industry basis as before.

The F.K.E. remained uneasy at apparent divisions within the K.F.L. over the prospect of an omnibus union. According to the F.K.E.'s Executive Officer, David Richmond, Owiti 'had repeatedly stated' that the founding of a combined coffee and sisal union was the first step in the K.F.L.'s policy to amalgamate 'at an early date' all the plantation and agricultural unions. He was nonetheless confounded by the contrary statements of K.F.L. leaders at a time when the F.K.E. needed to reassure its affiliates and pressed the federation to state its intentions over a prospective omnibus union 'as early as possible'.<sup>25</sup>

The incidence of amalgamation went beyond the plantation unions as other K.F.L. affiliates were also moving in this direction. Apart from other factors considered elsewhere here, workers were facing larger, more centralised employers in the form of monopolies and multinationals, putting pressure on the unions to reorganise themselves to confront these adversaries. Whilst acknowledging the significance of the 1957 agreement, Kibisu informed the employers that 'in view of the advanced stage of trade union organisation in the country', the K.F.L. believed it necessary to alter the agreement referred to, by amalgamating two or more unions in various sections of industry.<sup>26</sup> He

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<sup>23</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, section 16 [f] [1952].

<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: R.A.J. Damerell / Industrial Relations Organiser to Acting Labour Commissioner, 10 May 1962.

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: D.Richmond/F.K.E. Executive Officer to P.Kibisu / K.F.L. Acting General Secretary, 16.5.62.

<sup>26</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Kibisu to Richmond, 23 May 1962.

then reassured the F.K.E. that the S.C.P.W.U. would consist of two separate structures for collective bargaining in each industry, and that 'safeguards' would be written into the Union's constitution to ensure that a dispute in one industry did not spread to the other. He also re-emphasised an earlier contention that the two federations were responsible for deciding on their own structure of organisation.<sup>27</sup>

The K.C.G.A. shortly agreed to immediate negotiations over a provisional recognition agreement with the S.C.P.W.U. on the proviso that it agreed in writing to deal only with coffee matters, while the S.P.W.U. remained<sup>28</sup> in being to deal with sisal issues. However whilst Owiti indicated that he was prepared to enter into a sectional recognition agreement, he could not accept the independent existence of the sisal union seeing this as a threat to the process of amalgamation already underway. On June 2nd, Owiti told the Kenya Sisal Growers Association that the S.C.P.W.U. had taken over the functions of the S.P.W.U. 'which has been dissolved'. He tried to allay their fears by stressing that previous agreements would remain in force 'unless and until they are amended, rescinded or altered...'<sup>29</sup> The Union leadership, having embarked upon this course, could not go back. In any case, an application had already been made to the Registrar to have the S.P.W.U. de-registered. Its continued formal existence was only due to a current sisal board of inquiry<sup>30</sup> 'to which it is a party'<sup>31</sup>, relating to a trade dispute reported before amalgamation.<sup>32</sup> The coffee growers and the Union were locking horns with an ensuing impasse before them.

The worst fear of the K.C.G.A. lay in conceding recognition only to be drawn into a confrontation with the Union over secondary action related to a dispute with the sisal employers, where coffee workers would be called on strike in support of those employed in the sisal industry. This issue was left unresolved leaving the K.C.G.A. 'anxious' to recognise and negotiate with a union 'dealing solely with coffee'. While urging the K.F.L. to play its part in establishing a union 'for coffee only'<sup>33</sup>,

<sup>27</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Kibisu to Richmond, 29 May 1962.

<sup>28</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: I.R. Price/K.C.G.A. Executive to the Minister of Labour, 11 June 1962.

<sup>29</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: R.A.J. Damerell / Acting Labour Commissioner to S.C.P.W.U. / General Secretary, 2 June 1962.

<sup>30</sup> K.N.A./PQ/3/10: 'Report of the Board of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Wages of Workers Employed in Manual Occupations Pertaining to the Growing of Sisal and the Manufacture of Sisal Fibre, and the Arrangements existing within the Sisal Plantation Industry for determining Wages and other Conditions of Employment by Voluntary Collective Bargaining and Agreement', May 1962.

<sup>31</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, 11 June 1962.

<sup>32</sup> P.R.O. /CO/859/186/7/Trade Union Legislation: Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance, section 13 [1948].

<sup>33</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: A.Hyland / F.K.E. Assistant Executive Officer to the K.F.L. Acting General Secretary and to all members of the management board and the Standing Commission of Rural Employers, 8 June 1962.

the F.K.E. cautioned that the coffee employers accession to the interim settlement had been given on the understanding<sup>34</sup> that the threatened national coffee strike for June 10th would be called off. In line with its 'accept anything' reformist ideology, the K.F.L. gave no resistance, signed a guarantee that there would be no strike action and agreed to present the case for departure from the 1957 agreement 'with a view to determining the extent to which there may be recognition'<sup>35</sup> by the employers of a combined plantation union. Had a twelfth hour settlement been reached? It seemed as if the strike had been averted, though not without a warning of the approaching eruption on the estates. Assuming the strike was still on, workers at Kakuzi Fibrelands came out in support of the demand for recognition but returned the next day when the K.C.G.A. agreed to meet the Union.

By now Mboya was 'very anxious' for a settlement. Whilst demonstrating sympathy with the employers, "May I say I fully appreciate and understand your feelings in this direction....", he had only firmness and discipline for the Union. He assured the K.C.G.A. that he would extract a written clause or assurance from the Union, 'to be incorporated in any agreement with your Association', ruling out sympathy strikes. In the event of secondary action, any recognition agreement would 'thereby be rendered void'.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Course Towards an All Out Strike*

In the months preceding the climax of plantation unrest, most of Thika's industrial workers had been involved in important disputes, including those at Bulley's Tanneries, Nath Brothers, K.E.M.E. Ltd. and Metal Box. They had been joined in mid March by Nairobi County and Thika Urban District Council workers. Apart from a strike at Munyu sisal estate in April 1962, not a single plantation dispute was officially reported during the early months of the year. Once again, we should not discount the impact of these struggles on the mood and decision of plantation workers to move into all out confrontation.

Owiti attempted to address the growing unrest amongst these workers at a meeting in Makuyu market on April 22nd. He told the assembled that he realised 'that they lacked good leaders' and that he had decided to work for both coffee and sisal workers who he urged to join the new union and pay their monthly subs. He reminded everyone that agreement between the coffee employers and the

<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/123: A.Hyland to the Minister of Labour and to all members of the management board and the Standing Commissioner of Rural Employers, 8 June 1962.

<sup>35</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Interim agreement between the K.F.L. and the F.K.E. concerning relations between the Union and coffee industry employers, 9 June 1962.

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Mboya to K.C.G.A. Chairman, 15 June 1962.

de-registered C.P.W.U. had expired in February and that he was submitting a proposal to the K.C.G.A. for a new salary structure. The minimum the Union would settle for would be 250/- per ticket and 'better facilities than those given to coffee workers at present'.<sup>37</sup> Owiti promised that the standard daily picking task would be fixed at 2 debes, and cherry picked beyond task would be paid at 2/- a tin. The new union would also demand maternity leave for women workers with two months salary before birth and three months after at half salary. A further assembly ensued in May where Owiti announced the refusal of the coffee employers to grant union recognition. Owiti told 'between' 500 - 600 workers, that he believed the best course was to 'openly to call a strike if members were prepared to support him'. In a show of hands 'the whole meeting' agreed to support the strike. Another speaker who was 'believed to be'<sup>38</sup> a K.A.N.U. official from Kiambu said that his branch was prepared to support the strike by supplying food and persuading people in the reserve to stay away from work. By the middle of May, the reported mood amongst coffee workers was one of readiness for an all out stoppage.

At a Union meeting again in Makuyu on May 27th, Owiti addressed 600 sisal workers and declared his intention to call a general strike, though only of coffee workers, in support of the recognition demand. According to the labour inspector in attendance, the audience 'agreed to go on strike when called out'<sup>39</sup>, whilst the labour officer also attending observed that 'there was a general feeling that the strike, if called, will have their support' and that 'similar reactions' had been reported from Kiambu and Ruiru. Owiti then gave the employers until the end of the month to recognise the Union. Overall, the Labour Office was deeply concerned since 'it is generally believed that a large number of coffee employees will support such a strike. There are a number of estates where the workers' are just waiting Mr Owiti's signal to stop work'.<sup>40</sup> This overwhelming unity compelled Stephen Ngobe to write Mboya and impress upon him the combative mood amongst the membership, 'I unequivocally make you understand that our people, members and non-members are very united and they are going to think whether or not the so-called "picking" will take place before their case gets favourable consideration....else a thorn will be used to oust a thorn'.<sup>41</sup> Such a direct approach to the Minister of Labour, bypassing intermediate authorities, reflected a widespread belief amongst workers that Mboya was there in the Government to represent their interests, if only they

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<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, April 1962.

<sup>38</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, May 1962.

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, May 1962.

<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: Labour Officer/Thika to Senior Labour Officer /Central Province, 13 May 1962.

<sup>41</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Stephen Ngobe / S.C.P.W.U. Kiambu District Organiser to Minister of Labour, 28 May 1962.

could get to him through swathes of discredited officials. This practice had already provoked a reaction within the administration, prompting an outburst from the Labour Commissioner, '...we won't put up with branches of unions, and sundry individuals appealing to the Minister of Labour before going to field officers'.<sup>42</sup>

With the threat of an all out strike coinciding with the picking season, the climate of tension mounted on the estates. Owiti claimed that on some coffee farms collectors had been threatened that they 'would be shot dead' if they were found collecting subs. Amongst other issues fuelling the anger, was the increasing incidence in Kiambu of workers being forced to pick 5 tins of coffee to qualify for a days wage and reports of victimisation's of union activists throughout the district. The depth of feeling for strike action seems to indicate that workers understood that the struggle against the employers over these problems was inextricably linked to union recognition. Without their union, they were exposed and vulnerable. Owiti told Peter Kibisu that, 'Workers themselves have asked me more than once as to what the Union is doing about their plight and are willing to go on strike at any time so that the Union may be recognised'. He was at pains to impress upon the K.F.L. that the 'only remedy' to the situation was union recognition, 'otherwise I do not see how I can withdraw the strike notice'.<sup>43</sup>

By early June, the Union's patience with the employers' was 'completely exhausted' and notice was given to the Labour Commissioner 'that we are definitely calling workers in the coffee industry on strike on this specific case on June 10th, at midnight', though it was made 'absolutely clear' that this 'should not be regarded as political or wild cat strike'.<sup>44</sup> As the proposed strike drew nearer, the K.F.L. moved to restrain the Union with a request that it withdraw its strike notice claiming that the employers were going to recognise the Union and negotiate 'other matters'.<sup>45</sup> This intervention had not the slightest effect as Owiti since had no evidence of these moves in hand. A formal strike call was issued asking workers to 'stay away from work from coffee estates throughout Kenya'<sup>46</sup> with effect from June 10th.

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<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Filenote from Ian Husband /Acting Labour Commissioner to Permanent Secretary/ Ministry of Labour, 24 April 1962.

<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to K.F.L. General Secretary, 2 June 1962.

<sup>44</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Apollo Owiti / S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary to the Labour Commissioner, 30 May 1962.

<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Kibisu to S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 1 June 1962.

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to the S.C.P.W.U. membership, 4 June 1962.

In a letter to the Union, R.A.J.Damerell reflected the unease within the state apparatus at the 'ill effect a strike in the coffee industry would have on the economy of the country, which is already severely strained'.<sup>47</sup> In a meeting with Owiti, Damerell lectured on the damage strike action would have on the 'economic faith of investors' and threatened that if the S.C.P.W.U. and other trade unions 'persisted in defying Government advice on this subject', it would take 'appropriate legislative action'.<sup>48</sup>

*A Board of Inquiry: An Escape from the Impending Confrontation?*

Concerned about the sisal industry, the F.K.E. still refused to accept a joint union 'being imposed' upon its members 'under duress in direct contravention' of the 1957 agreement. Instead, it proposed a board of inquiry and even outlined its terms of reference, 'to enquire into and recommend whether it is proper' that coffee and sisal employers should recognise any union 'other than an industrial union'.<sup>49</sup> Such an inquiry was to be contingent on an undertaking from the S.C.P.W.U. that there would be no strikes in either industry pending publication of the board's findings and recommendations. Mboya was 'extremely disappointed' at the employers' proposal. His immediate concerns lay with the 'urgency of the situation'<sup>50</sup> which threatened an all out strike by 72,000 coffee workers. This was compounded by a real possibility that an enforced settlement resulting from a board of inquiry would enflame an already volatile situation.

When the Union then set on June 19th for its strike action to commence, the K.F.L. was compelled to organise a one day conference of union leaders on June 13th to decide its attitude. It unanimously resolved to urge the Government to come to a decision without further delay and before June 23rd at the latest. The K.F.L. told Mboya that after this date 'the entire Trade Union movement will proceed to decide on a date on which a General Strike Action will be taken in support of the recognition claim...'<sup>51</sup> At a meeting in Ruiru on June 16th, branch secretary Babu Kamau and his Kiambu counterpart Stephen Ngobe told workers that their demand for recognition had been refused and that the Union executive had decided to proceed with its plan to call them out on June 19th from 6.00 a.m. After Ngobe's assurance that the strike would have the 'full support' of the

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: R.A.J. Damerell / Acting Labour Commissioner to S.C.P.W.U. / General Secretary, 2 June 1962.

<sup>48</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Industrial Relations Officer to the Acting Labour Commissioner [Filenote], 1 June 1962.

<sup>49</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Colin Campbell / F.K.E. President to Minister of Labour, 16 June 1962.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: T.J. Mboya to F.K.E. President, 16 June 1962.

<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Kibisu to Minister of Labour, 15 June 1962.



K.F.L., 'the audience agreed to support the strike call'.<sup>52</sup> Mboya then appealed to the K.F.L. for restraint and proposed the board of inquiry. In view of the deadlock and impending strike, it took 48 hours for Mboya to capitulate to the F.K.E.'s formula. He was barely a month into his term of office and faced his first major challenge from the very labour movement onto whose back he had climbed to promote himself. This was also Mboya's first test of loyalty to the state as its direct servant. He urged the K.F.L. for more 'time' and to bring pressure to bear on the S.C.P.W.U. to call off the strike. A board of inquiry now seemed to be the last chance of avoiding the impending confrontation, but Mboya would need the consent of the Union to go down this road and be prepared for the attendant risks of an enforced settlement in the event its rejection by the contending parties.

Even with such consent the greatest obstacle of all remained, the militancy of the coffee workers themselves which, despite prevarication over the date of the strike, showed no signs of waning. This caused intractable problems for union leaders, reducing their room for manoeuvre and placing severe constraints upon their pragmatism and opportunism. After Mboya's meeting with K.F.L. and S.C.P.W.U. leaders on June 18th he informed the F.K.E president that union leaders had insisted on two conditions for ending the strike, that recognition be granted 'immediately in principle' and that a date be set to discuss the details of a recognition agreement. The employers were equally unflinching. The K.C.G.A. chairman and owner of Glenlee estate, M.de la Hayes, was adamant that "the principle of a separate union for Kenya's biggest industry is one we cannot compromise". He also issued a threat to the Union over the recent pay agreement, which would not be effected until a coffee workers union was formed. Hayes warned that the imminent strike would not only disable the industry from meeting its overseas quota but 'destroy its hopes of an increased allowance' on the world market and that surpluses from future increased production would have to be burned.<sup>53</sup>

At the final hour Mboya appealed to the employers 'to put before everything else the interests of the country'<sup>54</sup> and seek accommodation. Whilst embracing the board of inquiry, the K.C.G.A.'s position seemed to harden with its insistence that a combined union was contrary to the Mboya inspired agreement of 1957 and its 'principle' of one union for each industry. Nonetheless, the F.K.E. affirmed the interim character of the June 9th agreement during which the K.C.G.A. would recognise the S.C.P.W.U. on terms which would preserve its 'industrial' character 'pending resolution between us and K.F.L. of the variation of the 1957 Agreement'.<sup>55</sup> Already on the road to

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./AF1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, June, 1962.

<sup>53</sup> E.A.S. 15 June 1962: 'Coffee industry strike would cripple the economy - negotiations deadlocked.'

<sup>54</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Mboya to F.K.E. President, 18 June 1962.

<sup>55</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Colin Campbell to Minister for Labour, 18 June 1962.

confrontation, the F.K.E. fired a new salvo, this time at the Registrar, claiming that the S.C.P.W.U. had been given probationary registration 'contrary to the spirit if not the letter' of the Trade Union Ordinance 'which provides that under normal conditions only one Union shall recruit and represent workers in any one industry, and that one individual shall not be appointed as General Secretary of two unions'.<sup>56</sup>

The F.K.E. continued to push for a board of inquiry confident that, given Mboya's previous assurance to the K.C.G.A., things would go its way. In an attempt to put paid to Mboya's wavering, F.K.E. chairman Sir Colin Campbell referred to reports received from 'a wide variety of our members' indicating that the situation in the coffee industry would not 'be the sole reason' for a general strike. Campbell conjured up an amalgam of 'forces at work'<sup>57</sup> who were determined to call a general strike indifferent to the issues involved. Whether these were real or imagined, the imminent confrontation would be a political strike with issues far wider than the coffee industry. The K.F.L.'s rhetorical threat of a general strike then was a wake up call to the employers and the government that one was already on the way, a fact they would do well to recognise by dealing with the K.F.L. in preference to the 'rabble'.

All parties wished to defuse the impending confrontation by using the deliberations of the board to draw out the issues and dampen the spontaneity on the plantations and elsewhere. Fearful of the consequences of an industry wide strike at the height of the picking season and in the midst of turmoil on world markets, the K.C.G.A. appeared to partially give way as growers representatives met with the Minister of Agriculture. The K.C.G.A. suggested that separate unions should continue for 12 months after which they would be prepared to accept an amalgamated union. Nonetheless, the S.C.P.W.U. remained firm and insisted that it be fully recognised before any negotiations could take place.

Mboya, the would be Fabian architect of class compromise in Kenya was forced to recognise the stark realities of a situation that had by-passed the possibilities of voluntary 'free negotiation'. In his reply to the F.K.E. of June 19th, he formally conceded to their demand for a board of inquiry, within the terms of the Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance in the hope 'that no strike action would be taken until the board had submitted its report'.<sup>58</sup> The terms of reference for the

<sup>56</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Colin Campbell to Minister for Labour, 18 June 1962; M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, section 16 [f] [1952].

<sup>57</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Colin Campbell to Minister for Labour, 18 June 1962.

<sup>58</sup> E.A.S. 19 June 1962: 'Kenya Coffee Workers Strike Today - Board of Inquiry to Investigate Dispute.'

inquiry focussed on the question of union recognition for the purpose of voluntary collective bargaining and rights of access to union members and potential recruits residing on the plantations.<sup>59</sup> Mboya then cued his labour commissioner to exercise his power to refer these matters to a board of inquiry.<sup>60</sup> A crippling strike had been avoided, or had it? It seems that by this time Mboya had evolved a new aim, to orchestrate the inquiry by usurping the independence of both parties, thereby strengthening his own autonomy to facilitate a settlement. What end would this serve?

This was shortly revealed as the K.F.L.'s intent to amalgamate all of Kenya's plantation unions resurfaced. As he raised the proposal on June 20th, the second day of the strike, T.P.W.U. general secretary Peter Owino condemned the S.C.P.W.U. for leading a stoppage that was contrary to the existing agreement between the K.F.L. and the F.K.E. What kind of 'amalgamation' was Owino peddling and what were the origins of such a formula? His opposition to the strike suggested a 'unity' that would preserve and uphold the sectionalism that the strikers were discarding, though on a wider scale incorporating the tea and sugar unions. Owino was advocating the appearances of unity as a 'thing-in-itself' beneath which the fictitious 'boundaries' between plantation workers would continue as before. Once such a structure was put in place not only would the employers get all they wanted, even inspite of themselves, the authority of the state would also be strengthened. A larger, bureaucratically controlled union would facilitate tighter state control over the plantation workforce. The origins of Owino's formula and intervention was almost certainly Mboya himself. The two men were known to be close and Owino may have been airing views that the Minister of Labour was politically unable to at this juncture. It seems probable that Mboya used Owino, one of a whole layer of lieutenants, to throw this formula into the ring for him. The planters were far from ready for it. Mboya's agenda for the board of inquiry was to assuage their fears, facilitate the combined union and prime them for an even larger combination in the near future.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Material Basis of Sectionalism and Uniformity*

The attempt to cast two unions within a union reinforced artificial divisions at a time when workers in all sectors of the plantation economy were facing uniform problems arising from the related issues of tasks, time and discipline. In full knowledge of the emerging coherence of all its parts, the employers and the state worked to sever the growing links between different sections of

<sup>59</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Mboya to F.K.E. President, 19 June 1962.

<sup>60</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: J.I.Husband /Acting Labour Commissioner and T.Mboya/ Minister for Labour, Gazette No.2912 concerning the Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance Section 13, 'Reference of Matters to a Board of Inquiry'.

<sup>61</sup> Daily Nation 21 June 1962: 'Amalgamation Plea.'

the working class. These were intentionally 'fractionalised, disaggregated into a multitude of partial struggles limited to each firm, to each branch of production.'<sup>62</sup> This aimed to keep organised labour where it was, essentially demobilised and off the stage, allowing the transmutation of the colonial state to run its course without hindrance. This was the ground that enabled the ideology of bourgeois nationalism to take a hold, as in the political appearances of the individualisation of class relations where 'all' appeared as undifferentiated 'individuals' or 'citizens'.

The advent of the omnibus union, whilst a step forward contained all these contradictions. On the one hand, a growing unity amongst plantation and agricultural workers was the positive source of a merger which challenged arbitrary divides. Contrariwise, given recognition on the terms of the employers, erstwhile barriers to class action and political awareness would remain in place. This was compounded by the drive for more control by union leaders who were losing their grip. A more centralised union could farm more financial resources to help stabilise the bureaucratic stratum. Indeed, this layer wanted to institutionalise and rationalise sectionalism to an even greater degree by putting structural divisions more firmly in place and under greater control within an amalgamated union. This was the reinstatement of sectionalism under another guise at a time when workers were running up against such boundaries. In other respects this was a political strategy to imprison workers within categorical enclaves, to encase them in narrow 'trade' identities, crucial to the project of rebottling the demon that had escaped.

Even though trade unionism in the imported sense was founded on the conservatism of craft identity, many workers were developing multiple 'trade' identities that transcended and came into conflict with such imposed classifications. In Kenya, this had become somewhat fictional within a labour process on the plantations dominated by de-skilling and in a labour market by ultra-flexibility. Still, employers hoped that fixed attachments to particular 'trades' would help to facilitate control over the workforce. Hence their desire for unions which would confine themselves to narrow craft based concerns in particular industries as provided for under the 1957 agreement. These positivist fictions were detached from the vitality of social relations, indeed they were advanced to imprison them.

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<sup>62</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, 'The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions', in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* [New York, 1970], p.202.

The plantation workers of the sixties were of a new kind, far from the unsettled docile migrant labour force characteristic of the Emergency. They laboured alternately between factory, farm and plantation, crossing occupational and geographical boundaries within and between rural and urban locations. Their immediate kin networks were more likely to be in the area where they worked and they were more inclined to change their employers within the same area. Their contractual ties to the employers were also closer and more intense, facilitating an enforced flexibility in the workplace. The alternation between a more varied range of tasks was especially marked on the coffee plantations. Whilst the employers were imposing heavier tasks than before, they were also demanding that workers switched more frequently from one task to another. Far from being 'trade' specialists, workers were required *inter alia* 'to do any of the following tasks at any time'<sup>63</sup>: picking, weeding, mulching, manuring, decouching, spraying, pruning, irrigation, maintaining roads and factory work. Hence we can begin to understand why these employers were so concerned to change the terms of contract for their resident labour. Above all else, these were to be moulded as wage dependent workers for whom petty commodity production was to be relegated to all but a minor subsistence role in their lives.

As to casual labourers, they picked coffee, cut sisal and engaged in the factory processing of these crops interchangeably throughout the year, only to take up better paid work in Thika's industrial area or in the township when it became available. Whilst workers continued to be attracted to employment in the urban areas, they could just as easily return to work on the plantations. The commencement of coffee picking in Thika district during April 1962 'tended to draw most of the manual type of labour back into the reserves from the Urban area. A large number of them have now taken up employment on neighbouring estates as pickers'.<sup>64</sup> Whereas in the past many such workers migrated seasonally backwards and forwards, dividing their labour time between rural homesteads and waged employment, it seems that larger numbers were more dependent on the labour market than before. These workers were bypassing their shambas and were moving more often between places of work with their social security at the mercy of the market.

Overall, the new type of workers were more versatile and multi-faceted. Their more varied work experience was an objective expression of the development of the productive forces and their impact on social relations. The patterns of ownership within the two industries showed that sisal and coffee

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<sup>63</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20: Arbitrator [Jimmy Verjee] Report, 'In the matter of an Arbitration of a Trade Dispute between the S.C.P.W.U. and the K.C.G.A.', November 1962.

<sup>64</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33 : Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Reports, May 1962.

in Kenya were more often grown side by side on mixed estates or adjacent plantations. Where this obtained, 'by and large' labour was 'interchangeable'.<sup>65</sup> The trends towards the concentration and centralisation of ownership, combined with the diversification of production, had been proceeding uninterrupted in the plantation sector throughout the fifties as plantation companies diversified into one or other commodity. The emergence of a joint plantation union partially reflected a consciousness amongst plantation workers themselves that their organisation had to change to confront the owners, highly organised in production and politically empowered through employers associations.

Overall, the K.F.L. and the employers organisations shared a community of aim in upholding sectionalism. Their differences lay in the employers desire to leave things where they were, whilst the K.F.L. was seeking a variant of amalgamation which left craft boundaries intact. The K.F.L.'s unstated aim was to wield a tight control over its affiliates on behalf of the state. By demonstrating its political reliability it hoped to better place itself to contend for the state's favour and co-operation. On the other hand, the employers wanted less state involvement and more company control. This was to take the form of company or industrial unions, controlled more by employers associations in the industries concerned than by the Ministry of Labour. Hence the employers support for 'voluntary' free collective bargaining, less bounded by statutory bodies and regulations, such as wages councils. Thus, we can begin to understand the F.K.E.'s harping on the unevenness within each industry and the 'question of variations'<sup>66</sup> in wage rates paid by European, Asian and African employers, in order to justify its course. They argued that an amalgamated union would run aground against the exceptional conditions within each industry, according to different types of employer, their resources and ability to meet those terms and conditions which applied to more than one industry. With an unprecedented economic crisis before them, the coffee planters were unable to relent in their struggle with the state for control over the workforce. For its part, the colonial state was undergoing a fragile transmutation which made it unable to tolerate the revolutionary potential of the organised working class. As this conflict unfolded, plantation employers were forced to relinquish much of their erstwhile control over the trade unions to the state machine, though not without a struggle.

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<sup>65</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20: Verjee Report, p.9.

<sup>66</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Richmond to Mboya, 28 April 1962.

## 9. *The 'Coffee General Strike' and the Stresses of Compromise*

### *An All Embracing Conflict*

An all embracing conflict had already erupted by the time the Union had moved into its first official all out strike. At Gakomo estate in Kiambu, 78 workers came out on May 31st for a week with an array of grievances which presaged the struggle ahead. These included wages, bonuses, rations, tasks, hours, housing, fines, sackings and the behaviour of headmen. Significantly, after 'protracted' discussions with the K.C.G.A. it was agreed that the Union should be involved in efforts to bring the strike to an end though on an 'informal basis'. Roused by the strike call of June 10th some coffee workers had already been out in Makuyu at Kakuzi Fibrelands, Kirimiri and Matungulu estates. Whilst at Plovers Haunt in Ruiru and at Murita and Kibubuti estates in Kiambu, strikes were also underway. Nearly a thousand workers at the Bata Shoe factory in Limuru also struck between June 8-12th in support of union demands for higher wages and improved conditions in defiance of an arbitration award. The Kenya Shoe and Leather Workers Union shortly declared its preparedness to strike in sympathy with the coffee workers. A major impetus to this developing movement undoubtedly came from Nairobi City Council workers who had been on strike for over a week and from the engineering strikes at K.E.M.E. Ltd. and Metal Box in Thika's industrial area where workers came out on June 18th.

The K.F.L.'s threat to call a general strike was a backhanded recognition that one was already developing, representing a convergence of plantation and farm labour with workers on the railways, in industry and local government. The state was concerned by the broader implications of this movement as it threatened its political authority, imperilled preparations for independence and frightened overseas investors. In his budget speech, the Minister of Finance, James Gichuru lambasted "strikes called contrary to agreements previously reached or before all the normal methods of negotiation have been fully explored are discouraging to new investment and damaging to economic progress". The Government's main worries were focused on spontaneous wildcat disputes beyond the control of union officials, where 'management's have not received notice of a dispute or have had no initial approach before finding there is a strike on their hands'. There were fears that 'if labour continues to be withdrawn without recourse to the recognised conciliation machinery the whole fabric of the country's economy will be shattered'. There were constant refrains of strikes only in the 'last resort', pursuing demands within 'constitutional bounds', and no strikes at all for workers in essential services. Peter Kibisu, the K.F.L.'s acting general secretary blamed the strike

wave as 'politically motivated' and admitted that the K.F.L. sometimes did 'not know the reason for strikes having been called'. In the eyes of the 'East African Standard' the strike movement was a direct 'challenge to the National Government on the eve of independence'.<sup>1</sup> Taken as a whole, the spontaneity of the engulfing strike wave was of a decidedly irreconcilable character. There can be little doubt that the events of June 1962 were a major turning point for Kenya's trade union movement, a crucial juncture that had taken a decade to mature.

In response to their Union's strike call, coffee workers came out at 6 a.m. on June 19th, in a conflict that threatened to cause 'more damage to Kenya than any single disturbance since the Emergency period'.<sup>2</sup> The prospect that the dispute would spread to the tea and sisal plantations was very real, since these workers had established a pattern of following each other into action. In a break with tradition, this was the first occasion on which a Kenyan trade union had been taken by its leaders into strike action in disregard of a board of inquiry. The S.C.P.W.U. leaders were compelled by their instincts of self preservation to follow and to give something of a rhetorical lead. As to the K.F.L., it waited upon events, procrastinating over its general strike call to the last. It would give the employers another few days, it said. Which way would the movement go? How long before workers exhausted their energies? As the K.F.L. kept vigil for an eleventh hour capitulation by the K.C.G.A., none was forthcoming. Their prayers were focused on the appearance of an escape route which would come by attaching the strike to a board of inquiry. K.F.L. leaders worked hard to channel the dispute along this course, in the hope of using the strike to bring pressure to bear on the board's deliberations. The federation duly pressured the Union to facilitate the work of the board by resubmitting its case for recognition. For the K.F.L. the strike was subordinate to this end, but as the action escalated hopes for the inquiry began to fade as neither side were prepared to give any undertakings.

### *The Strike in Kiambu*

As the strike hit Kiambu, all coffee farms were brought to a standstill. Few workers disregarded the strike call as 'roads throughout the district appeared deserted', and by June 22nd the strike was '95% effective'.<sup>3</sup> According to the Minister of Commerce and Industry, "intimidation was very rife" particularly in those estates on the edge of the Kikuyu reserves since they were "within easy reach of the K.A.N.U. Youth Wing...". He accused the strikers of ignorance and bad behaviour, and decried

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<sup>1</sup> E.A.S. 8 June 1962: 'Industrial Relations.'

<sup>2</sup> E.A.S. 19 June 1962: 'Zero Hour Today.'

<sup>3</sup> K.N.A./ VK 4/4: Enclosure 138.



that "the bulk of those on strike knew little of the disservice they were doing Kenya presently and in many cases were not fully aware of what they were striking for."<sup>4</sup> The Government had to isolate and contain this incubus at all costs if 'public opinion' was to be prepared for the coercive intervention which lurked in the background.

Overall, according to official figures for Kiambu district alone, the strike affected some 200 estates and involved 'approximately' 15,000 workers, incurring a loss of 480,000 man hours. In addition there were a further 12 strikes in which 2,590 workers participated resulting in a loss of 71,545 man hours.<sup>5</sup> Throughout Kenya as a whole, the number of strikes and disputes which occurred during the month was the highest on record.<sup>6</sup> The strike's aim of union recognition was also fed by a wide range of long standing grievances including wages, working hours, excessive tasks, unpopular headman, sackings, bonuses and the housing of dependants. With house servants, milkers and herdsmen 'out on most estates'<sup>7</sup> the F.K.E. Rural Employers Committee attempted to separate them from the rest of the strikers. Stephen Ngobe agreed that this 'special category' of workers should resume work and 'issued instructions to this effect' for which he was commended for his 'most responsible attitude'.<sup>8</sup> During the strike relations between Ngobe and the Labour Office drew closer, evidenced by a 'mutual spirit of confidence', even though the strikers themselves were hardly reconciled to such a relationship.

A further ten estates joined the strike subsequent to the call for a return to work on June 24th over what were perhaps, after union recognition, the most burning issues of this conflict, the misconduct of headmen and the now universal demand to scrap the three debe picking task in favour of a standard two debes per day. The Labour Office invested considerable energies into securing a resumption of work on these estates, indeed they were the most difficult disputes of all. By the end of the June, 348 workers on four of the estates were still out. Even though it rushed to settle them, none of these strikes were supported by the Union. In each case 'independent' inquiries, contingent upon an immediate return to work, were held. The inquiry at Kiltannon estate into allegations against the headman and night watchman dragged on through July and into August.

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<sup>4</sup> E.A.S. 20 June 1962: 'Board Set Up, but strike goes on - Coffee estates brought to a standstill in Kiambu area: K.F.L. to keep general strike situation under constant review.'

<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/15/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 2/1/62 - 1R7/8/62; See appendix 18 giving details of coffee strikes in Kiambu during the course of 1962.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1 to put these figures in the context of industrial disputes in Kenya, 1951-74.

<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4 : Enclosure 138.

<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/35: Kiambu Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1962.

What alarmed all except the strikers themselves was the emergence of 'elected workers estate committees'. These were quite different from the corporatist estate consultative committees in that managers and supervisors were excluded from their proceedings. After learning that on more than one estate, workers committees had taken it upon themselves to give instructions to estate managers on the nature and size of tasks, Ngobe intervened and 'held several meetings' with the committees, 'giving advice' on their 'functions'.<sup>9</sup> Once again, the Labour Officer fawned over Ngobe's 'expeditious and responsible manner'<sup>10</sup> in dealing with this 'trend', and bringing these unofficial strikes to a conclusion. Nonetheless, 78 strikers at Gakomo estate, whose action had heralded the strike movement in early June, came out again inspite of a 'warning' that they should not strike without Ngobe's authority. They stopped work on June 25th in support of their demand that five workers dismissed for 'persistent disobedience' be reinstated. All the strikers were sacked. Following a meeting on July 5th, the employer offered to rehire 71 of their number whilst ordering the rest to leave.

*'Reconciling' the Irreconcilable: The Role of Tom Mboya*

Faced with such irreconcilable opposites, Mboya was concerned 'to review the situation immediately'. He had already appointed a board of inquiry which, in all of a whirlwind, 'should be able to report to us by next week'. He appealed to the Union in the 'general interests of the country' and the 'need for economic recovery' to cancel or suspend strike action pending its report. Mboya was acutely aware of the impact of the strike on the developing consciousness of the coffee workers and how difficult it would be to arrest as the struggle deepened. Whilst acknowledging the 'unity and strength' of the strikers, it was Mboya's desire that they should abdicate their independence to the course of the inquiry, which 'must determine the issue'. Amongst the strikers themselves there seemed little evidence of any regard for a body that was above and apart from the conflict.

To this end, Mboya repeated his appeal to the Union's leaders to call off the strike 'immediately' on the grounds that the workers had demonstrated their unity and made their point. Now it was down to the board of inquiry to do its work. Whilst Mboya had severed his ties with the K.F.L., he was compelled to use his past record for all it was worth by cultivating a contrived sympathy with the strikers. Nonetheless this was founded on the dwindling illusion that he was their man in the government, their principal spokesman who would make all the difference to the benefits they would reap from 'Uhuru'. Mboya emphatically urged the Union to consider 'the country, the workers and

<sup>9</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/35: Kiambu Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1962.

<sup>10</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/35: Kiambu Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1962.

the national interest which, above all, we must all serve and to which I am sure we are all dedicated'. He challenged the Union's leaders 'to prove your ability to call off the strike' or put at risk 'the goodwill and support of the country' which would make 'it difficult for the machinery we want to put into operation..., to function immediately and fully while the strike is still on'.<sup>11</sup> The transmutation of the colonial state was being rudely interrupted.

The appeal to the S.C.P.W.U. to surrender the struggle to the board of inquiry, did not fall on deaf ears but on a leadership with an active volcano beneath it. Some symptoms of a civil war, one as yet in its early stages, were showing themselves on the plantations as workers, Union officials and even Owiti were threatened at gunpoint by 'coffee settlers'. In Kiambu, a prominent member of the K.C.G.A. had entered the Union's branch office with a loaded pistol which he aimed at an official 'forcing him to sign a document to the effect that workers must resume work at once'.<sup>12</sup> In other developments, Peter Kibisu, now the K.F.L. general secretary, claimed that he had received reports that some growers were forcing strikers to work by placing them under armed guard.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to Mboya, Owiti drew further attention to cases where strikers had been forced to go back to work at gunpoint and to instances where Union officials had been charged with trespass. He urged the Government 'to restrain and stop forthwith' the actions of vigilante settlers. Owiti wished to comply with Mboya in calling an end to the strike, but the anger and militancy of a provoked membership would hardly allow for this. He referred to 'an open industrial war' which was making the conditions for reconciliation impossible, 'I fail to see how the understanding can be brought about between the two parties'. Even so, he left the door ajar and underlined his preparedness to meet Mboya to 'discuss the situation'.<sup>14</sup>

At a meeting of Kenya's Council of Minister's on June 21st, Mboya attempted to reassure his coalition masters that "though some of the strikes had represented fairly serious threats, most had been settled quickly". His anodyne performance turned to the press which "had greatly exaggerated the gravity of the situation". Mboya claimed that "at the moment" there was no immediate prospect of a general strike and that "very shortly" he expected an end to the strikes in the coffee, bus and motor engineering industries. The threat of a general strike signified a political confrontation with the state, not so much in its role as umpire but as the undraped protector of the employers. Had the crisis situation been overestimated, or, was this an attempt by Mboya to reassure his mentors when

<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/123: Mboya to S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 20 June 1962.

<sup>12</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to Minister of Labour, 21 June 1962.

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: Enclosure 138.

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to Minister of Labour, 21 June 1962.

their weaknesses were most exposed? Mboya's allusions to "the moment" suggested a state machine that was drifting, unable to stare into the abyss before it. This irrational scepticism towards the strike movement combined with an evolving political crisis which contained inherent dangers that the coercive state apparatus would lash out with indiscriminate violence.<sup>15</sup>

### *A General Strike in all but Name*

As the strike entered its third day, 'all' the plantations throughout the Thika and Kiambu districts were 'out a 100%'.<sup>16</sup> Over 28,000 workers were reported to be on strike throughout Thika where, during the four day action, 896,000 man hours were lost.<sup>17</sup> Despite the persistence of famine and unemployment throughout the district, returns from the labour exchanges indicated that 'few applicants applied for work on the coffee estates'<sup>18</sup> during the strike. Once again, this reveals the strength and cohesion of community support networks within the reserves. The strike was by now showing signs of spreading to Nyeri where the manager of Marrian Farm reported that 'all' coffee workers were on strike.<sup>19</sup> A leafleting campaign was organised in the area to urge workers to join the Union whilst its officials visited plantations in the district to "see how much intimidation is being used against workers by employers."<sup>20</sup> As the spectre of the General Strike cast its shadow, the K.C.G.A. worried that the strike 'might spread' to other parts of the country, in what was already being referred to as the 'coffee general strike'.<sup>21</sup> Thika's Labour Officer reported that, as in Kiambu, the 'most interesting feature of this strike was the fact that in many cases house servants, milkers, watchmen, herdsmen and others not connected with coffee, joined the strike'.<sup>22</sup> For how long could the K.F.L. hold the floodgates?

By June 22nd, the resolve of the Owiti leadership had collapsed. An agreement that all strikers should return to work 'immediately'<sup>23</sup> was signed by Owiti, de la Hayes for the K.C.G.A. and Mboya. Billed as a 'temporary' settlement, the S.C.P.W.U. leaders agreed to 'suspend' the action pending the results of the board of inquiry. A twelfth hour agreement had been reached in mid

<sup>15</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871/ Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Extract from Minutes of 22nd [Special] Meeting of Council of Ministers, 21 June 1962.

<sup>16</sup> E.A.S. 22 June 1962: Hopes fade in coffee industry dispute settlement.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 17 for details of coffee strikes in Thika during the course of 1962.

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/35: Kiambu Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1962.

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./VK/4/4: Enclosure 138.

<sup>20</sup> E.A.S. 22 June 1962: Hopes fade in coffee industry dispute settlement.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33 : Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1962.

<sup>23</sup> E.A.S. 23 June 1962: Stoppage Ends after Talks.

stream which enabled the K.F.L. to call off the General Strike 'in sympathy with coffee workers' threatened for June 23rd. There was relief all around as the K.F.L. leadership gave notice that "in order to keep the board of inquiry functioning..., we shall suspend the strike".<sup>24</sup> In fact these were manoeuvres to end the mass strike altogether just when there were visible signs that more workers were coming out to join the action. In a telegram of June 22nd, Sir Patrick Renison told the Secretary of State that the strike would be called off 'tonight' and indicated that the board of inquiry would shortly begin its work. He breathed a sigh of relief that with plantation workers returning, 'the problem created by cow milkers on some estates staging sympathy strikes at the risk of suffering and disease amongst un milked animals will be solved'.<sup>25</sup> He also indicated that proposals for ending the strike in the motor engineering trade were being considered and that the bus strikes in Nairobi and Mombasa had ended. Echoing Mboya, Kibisu anointed the S.C.P.W.U. since it had 'demonstrated its strength' and through its 'responsible attitude' had convinced the Kenyan public of its case for recognition. For the labour bureaucracy this struggle was never conceived of to win, but as a display of 'strength' tempered by legality and respect for property rights and state authority. Here was a prostrate acceptance of things as they were.<sup>26</sup>

In a letter to Renison, Mboya drew special attention to 'the efforts of Union staff' who have worked very hard during these difficult weeks, and I hope that very soon the situation will be returned to normal'. What kind of situation was a normal one for an aspirant 'nationalist' politician? One in which the irresistible tide of class antagonisms were contained, giving time to the state to recover itself and to prepare more thoroughly for a future resurgence. Mboya engaged Renison's appreciation of the utility of the labour bureaucracy in rescuing the social order in one of its gravest hour's of crisis. For how long could they contain the movement beneath them? 'Naturally there are some developments I would like to discuss with you.'<sup>27</sup>

Resistance was anticipated in achieving the return to work with the risk that workers would disregard the agreement, ignore instructions from their officials as they had done in the past and continue the strike. Paradoxically, the agreement gave Union officials the rights of access the strikers

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<sup>24</sup> E.A.S. 23 June 1962: General strike call suspended as last minute coffee dispute temporary settlement is struck.

<sup>25</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871/ Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Telegram from Sir P. Renison to the Secretary of State, 22 June 1962.

<sup>26</sup> E.A.S. 23 June 1962: General strike call suspended as last minute coffee dispute temporary settlement is struck.

<sup>27</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871 / Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Letter to Sir Patrick Renison from Tom Mboya, 25 June 1962.

were demanding, though with the purpose of enforcing a return to work on those estates where strikers remained defiant. It was one thing signing such an agreement but quite another matter to impose it on a struggle that had hardly begun. Even as the strike was called off there were reports from Kiambu of flying pickets, believed to made up of three men from each of the 15 estates in the settled area<sup>28</sup>, touring the district to spread the struggle even further. As some strikers drifted back, Union officials particularly in Ruiru complained of several cases of victimisation and threatened to call workers out again.<sup>29</sup> Within just two days there were signs of the agreement coming apart. A settler vigilante had entered one of the S.C.P.W.U.'s offices with a loaded gun provoking an angry statement from the Union that it was "seriously considering" a resumption of the strike, alleging the intimidation and victimisation of strikers. The Union made clear that it would "not hesitate to call members out again, and fairly soon, unless the victimised workers are reinstated henceforth".<sup>30</sup>

### *The Strike Movement Continues in Ruiru*

By the time the four day strike was at least officially concluded, other workers were just starting to join the action. In fact, more workers were out on strike when it was called off than at any other time during the action, a feature of previous mass strikes in Kenya.<sup>31</sup> There was every sign that workers were warming up for a greater and more protracted struggle which accounts for the severe problems in getting strikers to go back or work normally on the estates throughout Ruiru. This was the centre of most of the unofficial actions that occurred during the period from July to September. Settler farmers protested that strikes were being called to 'victimise' them, or were expressions of 'civil disobedience', and that some of the disputes had 'no proper foundations or good reasons'. It was common for employers to provoke and retaliate by carrying out mass discharges in order 'to eliminate some of the bad elements'.<sup>32</sup> While the board of inquiry was deliberating and even after it had issued its report, external struggles refused to be suspended, await its outcome, or follow its directives. The strike's demands for the reduction of standard picking and weeding tasks were raised repeatedly throughout the area during the course of July.

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<sup>28</sup> E.A.S. 23 June 1962: Terror gangs roam Kiambu to bring out workers.

<sup>29</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33 : Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, June 1962.

<sup>30</sup> E.A.S. 25 June 1962: New threat of general strike - coffee Union says it may break truce.

<sup>31</sup> D.N.Hyde, *The Nairobi General Strike*, M.A. dissertation, S.O.A.S. 1996.

D.N.Hyde, *The East African Railway Strike 1959-60*, unpublished S.O.A.S. monograph [1997].

<sup>32</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, September 1962.

Just as the strike was called off, fifty workers came out at Kilima Kogi estate demanding higher wages. At Crops Limited 65 labourers went on strike between June 26th-30th against victimisation and sackings after the manager discharged five workers for 'failing to obey lawful orders'. When the Labour Inspector visited the estate to question the strikers, 'none of them would reply'.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile at Socfinaf's Mchana Estate, 160 workers struck on June 25th demanding the dismissal of the assistant manager after an attempted lock out when he had turned half of them away for being 5 minutes late. This seems to have been a reaction to a go slow where workers were doing only half their normal set tasks on an alleged instruction from the Union.<sup>34</sup> In fact this was part of a generalised action throughout Ruiru where labourers were commonly working between 2 and 4 hours daily, and picking a maximum of 1 1/2 debes whilst demanding to be paid 'a full day's job plus rations'.<sup>35</sup> The Labour Commissioner condemned these disputes as being in breach of the agreement ending the coffee strike.

At Plover's Haunt 60 workers were provoked into strike action on July 3rd after an attempt to double their weeding tasks from 100 to 200 coffee trees, the management's failure to pay a worker for a completed ticket and by the headman's refusal to pay mid month advances. The headman had been the focus of general resentment on the estate since his refusal to participate in the recent strike. After they were addressed by Kamau and Owiti, the strikers agreed to return after the standard weeding task was set at 100 trees and their picking task fixed at two debes. The estate was again plagued by industrial action when on July 14th, fifteen strikers came out against the dismissal of four workers sacked for allegedly smoking 'bang'. The employer accused them of being 'bad hats' and alleged of the rest of the workers that 'they all smoke bang ...'.<sup>36</sup> All the strikers were then sacked, denied the right to harvest their crops and threatened with eviction orders if they did not leave the farm. Apparently they then went to pick on the adjacent farm in order to support themselves during the stoppage. At HKS coffee estate fifty workers, including milkers and herdsmen, came out on July 10th also insisting that four sacked workers be reinstated and that the headman be dismissed. Workers returned the following day after the manager agreed to their demands, though the headman was suspended 'pending enquiries'<sup>37</sup> by the Labour Office and the Union. These disputes refused to

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<sup>33</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July 1962.

<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123/S.C.P.W.U. General Correspondence, 1962-3: Acting Labour Commissioner to Industrial Relations Officer, 28 June 1962.

<sup>35</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1962.

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July 1962.

<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/57: Senior Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July 1962.

be reined in while the board of inquiry was deliberating. Even when it published its findings on July 12th, when recognition was formally conceded, the tide of unofficial action continued.

This was especially evident on Socfinaf's principal estates in the area which followed the pattern of struggle against heavy tasks and maltreatment. Workers at Oakland's had come out on July 6th over a 'sisal waste task'.<sup>38</sup> There was a return to work on July 16th after the Union reached a compromise with the management over the dispute and a further grievance concerning a weeding task of 150 trees. Thereafter workers adopted a 'go slow attitude' which lasted until the end of August when 'all weeding tasks were disputed'. Workers apparently 'stated that tasks should be set by the Union'.<sup>39</sup> At Ngewe Estate workers came out on strike over a weeding task of 300 trees which had been completed on the previous four days between 12 noon and 3 p.m., after starts between 7.15 and 7.45 a.m. They demanded the reduction of their set tasks and insisted 'very strongly' on the dismissal of their field conductor. The strike was a protracted one, lasting for most of July, during which some of the strikers were hauled before court on charges of 'intimidation' and fined 250/- which was paid out of strike funds.<sup>40</sup> Finally on July 30th, after a return to work, the management agreed to transfer the supervisor to another estate. Nonetheless, throughout August, as on the company's other estates, there was a 'go slow attitude'<sup>41</sup> with workers only returning to task work on August 24th.

At Tatu Estate, these issues resurfaced as 450 workers, including the women's gang, came out between July 2-12th in opposition to a heavy task and the 'insulting and abusive'<sup>42</sup> language used by the field conductor. The strikers demanded a reduction of both their weeding task from 300 to 150 trees and their picking task from 3 to 2 debes, and the dismissal of the field conductor. There was a return to work on July 16th after a meeting between the Labour Office and the K.C.G.A. agreed to set up an inquiry into workers complaints regarding the behaviour of three African supervisors. On July 27th, the workers came out on strike again, indignant that the supervisors were still at work and that the inquiry had 'not been properly conducted'.<sup>43</sup> They returned again on August 22nd only after Owiti 'had read the findings' of the inquiry to them. The struggle at Mchana estate began later on July 28 when both male and female gangs went on strike over a weeding task of 190 and 100 trees respectively. Owiti visited the estate and a compromise was negotiated to reduce tasks to 170 for

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<sup>38</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: 'Socfinaf Co. Ltd. Strikes 1962', Labour Officer's summaries.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July, 1962.

<sup>41</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: 'Socfinaf Co. Ltd. Strikes 1962', Labour Officer's summaries.

<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/15: L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1962.

<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: 'Socfinaf Co. Ltd. Strikes 1962', Labour Officer's summaries.



men and 80 for women. Workers returned on July 30th, though until the middle of August 'all works were very badly done and a go slow attitude adopted'.<sup>44</sup>

Babu Kamau's instructions to Socfinaf strikers not to speak to the owners, or with officials from the Labour Office, in the absence of union officials was already a widespread practice in the area. It seems to have been well understood that any communication under these conditions would only serve to sideline the Union and strengthen the employers' efforts to mould the terms of recognition. Workers did not lose sight of the centrifugal nature of union recognition around which everything else held satellite status.

Over in Kiambu there was 'an atmosphere of uneasy peace' on 'many' coffee estates, with the Labour Office reporting that workers had 'received little sympathy' from Union officials regarding a reduction in task work. Union officials were working hard to create 'a climate of mutual confidence and respect'<sup>45</sup> between themselves and the employers by attempting to discipline their members. Similarly in Thika district, since the end of the strike 'an increasing number of workers'<sup>46</sup> had enrolled into the Union and managements were by and large, in the absence of a recognition agreement, allowing officials and collectors to do their work. On the other hand there was an ever present danger of workers committees such as had raised their heads in Kiambu. Although as yet confined to a few estates, they threatened an alternative to bureaucratically controlled unions. These committees moved to set tasks independently of the management, a widespread clamour amongst plantation workers, thus raising an elementary demand for worker's control. Thus recognition was a double edge sword. To deny it was to court the prospect of something much worse, whilst to concede it was to deal with union officials who could barely restrain the spontaneity of their own members.

All the more reason then for the disciplinarians to be disciplined. The Labour Office pursued a complaint against Owiti lodged by a Union employee for non-payment of wages, and 'immediately' demanded his attendance at the office to resolve the issue. The apparent inefficient administration of its apparatus combined with a disdain for security continued to be fertile ground for turncoat allegations of corruption and misappropriation of funds giving the pretext for state scrutiny and interference into the Union's affairs.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, there were signs of a major upsurge in the

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/35: Kiambu Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1962.

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1962.

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Monthly Report, July 1962.

Kericho Valley as nearly 7,000 workers came out in succession over excessive weeding tasks, unpopular headmen, sackings and wages in fifteen reported strikes during July and early August. This again reaffirmed the established pattern for tea workers in Western Kenya to follow their counterparts on the coffee plantations of Central Province into industrial action.

Following events at Kiaora estate, a major resurgence in Thika occurred in early August which challenged the July agreement. The Criticos owned 600 acre combined coffee and sisal estate was on the fringe of the Gatundu Reserve. According to the Labour Office, there was 'a breakdown of discipline' and 'negligence' on the estate whose causes were cited as various. The labour camp on the estate was not fenced allowing 'trespassers' from the reserve to 'unlawfully' occupy vacant huts. Cattle from the nearby reserve were also 'illegally' grazing on the estate. According to the Labour Office, there was 'a complete lack of discipline' amongst Kiaora workers fuelled by the brewing of 'illicit' liquor despite several police raids and arrests. Worse still, workers were going to work 'whenever they feel like' and 'illegal meetings go on at night'.

On July 31st, the owner told the Labour Office that he wanted to 'reduce' forty labour as part of a reorganisation of the estate's sisal production. He claimed that the River Gatundu was not providing enough water for decortication in the estate's processing factory and blamed people in the reserves for carrying out heavy irrigation, leading to a fall in the estate's output from 100 to 60 tons a day. The furrow leading the water from the main river to the factory had also been broken by the previous year's floods and had only been partly repaired at a cost of 'about' £25,000. The management alleged that it was forced to 'cut down' the labour force for 'economy purposes'. The imposed redundancies included male and female, field and factory labourers. This encountered solid resistance from the estate's 400 coffee and sisal workers who 'refused to either accept their wages or leave the Estate'. They came out on unofficial strike on August 2nd and 'declined to talk' to the management or to an official from the Labour Department 'who was deemed a stooge of Her Majesty the Queen.' Attempts to persuade the strikers to go back were 'without success', not least due to the recruitment of 'scab' labour.

The steadfastness of Kiaora strikers in face of both their employer and duplicitous union officials attracted widespread support. On August 10th, ten Ruiru coffee estates went on a 'token strike' in sympathy with the Criticos workers. These strikers again advanced demands common to workers throughout the area principally a reduction in heavy tasks, the dismissal of field conductors and headmen for 'unwarranted activities' and opposition to redundancies generally. Most of the coffee

estates situated along Theta Road came out as flying pickets toured the area. Tensions seemed highest at Ngoliba estate where 400 workers had already been out for nine days, and at Munya and Brooke estates where workers had been out since August 8th. In both disputes workers were 'disgruntled' over the terms and conditions of the July settlement. This upsurge forced an immediate retreat by their employers, who reduced tasks and granted Sunday pay. The police reported that 40 'self styled Youth-Wing' had been around the farms on Theta Road on August 9th 'advising' estate workers to strike the following day 'in sympathy' with the Criticos workers. The police were 'after' these men, though it was not known whether the 'Youth-Wing' was a 'formation'<sup>48</sup> of the Kiaora men themselves.

This spontaneous action embarrassed the Union leadership, and threatened to undermine its efforts to stabilise relationships on the plantations in accord with the recognition agreement. Owiti and Kamau went to Kiaora estate where initially they 'were welcomed'. They 'appealed' to the strikers to go back in order to strengthen the Union's case to the management that the redundant workers were being victimised for being 'strong' supporters of the Union. Whilst the Theta Road strikers had obeyed their Union's instruction to return, the Kiaora workers were unrelenting. Owiti told them that the Union 'was not going to be interested in their case'<sup>49</sup> on the grounds that it would get back to the employer that Union members had refused to accept the advice of their officials. By the end of their 'speeches', workers were evidently angry at what they heard as Owiti was 'provoked' and 'forced to leave the meeting thoroughly annoyed'. Owiti then made his way to Thika 'fully decided' to 'seek the help' of the District Commissioner 'to evict the redundant labour'. This was going too far even for the district administration, who wanted to be seen treating this as an industrial dispute and could see 'no violence or infringement of the law...'<sup>50</sup> Babu Kamau then made a direct approach to Mboya to intervene into the dispute, a course repudiated by Owiti who was desperate to appear policing the terms of the July agreement.<sup>51</sup> When the redundant workers were eventually evicted they refused to pick up their wages from the Labour Office or remove their personal belongings from the district commissioners compound. Apparently, the evicted workers were still returning to the estate at night to 'take shelter' and 'continued to live there illegally'. A delegation from the workers visited Kenyatta in Nairobi asking him to take up their case. This was referred to Mboya, who instructed Thika's Labour Office to conduct an inquiry into the seven week strike<sup>52</sup>, though this

<sup>48</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/15: L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1962.

<sup>49</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, August 1962.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/15: L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1962.

<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, August 1962.

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, August 1962.

seems to have come to nothing. The workers were then arrested on September 21st and charged with 'criminal trespass'.<sup>53</sup> They were all fined and given the option of two months in a detention camp.

Even with a return to work, the glowing embers of the strike wave remained. How long before a resurgence commenced? Fearing a conflagration, there were serious discussions between Nairobi and the Colonial Office concerning the deployment of soldiers. The preoccupying question was whether, 'If Kenya have to ask for use of troops ...', these should be drawn from the Kings African Rifles 'or that British troops are used....'. There was some hand wringing at the Colonial Office as to 'whether this is a proper function of the K.A.R. for which we should pay or whether Kenya should be charged.' <sup>54</sup>

### *Board of Inquiry Resuscitated*

Under pressure from all quarters, a limp board of inquiry staggered on and attempted to recommence its work. Whilst Union leaders worked hard to enlist support for it, the employers dragged their feet. Kibisu accused the K.C.G.A. of 'being rude to the board and of trying to delay its work'.<sup>55</sup> Proceedings had been adjourned to allow the growers time to study their case and collect more statements, but when the board reconvened the employers failed to turn up. Tom Mboya knew that without the force of legal compulsion, boards of inquiry would be washed away in the rapids of the continuous struggles that were dominating the scene. The board of inquiry into the coffee strike became part of the essential preparation for the tripartism that was to become the backbone of Kenya's post independence system of industrial relations. Since neither parties to the conflict appeared able to compromise, the pressure mounted on Mboya to enforce a settlement with legal sanction if necessary. He had to tread with care since this would be a sharp break with past practice and could give early exposure to the evolving tripartite dictatorship. Besieged by strikes on the estates and throughout industry, and with these considerations in mind, he called a 'joint industrial conference' of the K.F.L. and the F.K.E. to draw up a 'charter of industrial relations'. This was calculated to give the appearance of consensus to a legal dictatorship in the making. In opening the conference, Mboya warned employers and union leaders of their 'responsibility to Kenya' for

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<sup>53</sup> K.N.A./AF/1/5: Thika Labour Inspector's Report, September 1962.

<sup>54</sup> P.R.O./CO/822/2871/ Labour Unrest in Kenya, 1960-2: Margaret Davis/ memo/ H. 342, 31 August 1962.

<sup>55</sup> E.A.S. 27 June 1962: 'Growers Rude.'

securing 'industrial peace'. He had harsh words for workers who "should stop this nonsense of going on strike without even knowing why they are on strike".<sup>56</sup>

Whilst the inquiry's report, published on July 6th,<sup>57</sup> made an implicit recommendation for amalgamation, it was careful to give a dual semblance of gain for both sides. The appearance of a greater unity amongst plantation workers had to be carefully displayed to solicit their support, whilst the Union was required to "embody safeguards".<sup>58</sup> On this basis, the board had 'no hesitation' in recommending that the K.C.G.A. should 'immediately' enter into discussions with the Union to complete a recognition agreement. Far from extending workers rights however, the agreement withdrew them. Billed as a 'safeguard', to placate the employers, a no-strike clause laid down that no dispute could take place in conjunction with workers in another plantation sector. The standard 21 days notice of strike action was re-emphasised, with the report stressing that notice should not be advanced until the given dispute had been discussed exhaustively in the S.J.C. The report made clear that any breach of these conditions would lead to automatic derecognition<sup>59</sup> of the Union. Thus sectionalism was reinstated by the backdoor with a no strike clause to boot. Paradoxically, after ruling out sympathy or secondary action, the report stressed the comparability of pay rates and the identical 'labour problems' that existed in the coffee and sisal industries.

The K.C.G.A. demanded that the Union declare its acceptance of these safeguards and cancel its strike notice, which had so far been merely suspended, as a prerequisite for formal recognition. A capitulation followed as the Union announced its support for the board's recommendations and formally cancelled the strike. The K.C.G.A. granted provisional recognition prior to negotiations on a full agreement which was eventually signed on August 22nd. This covered access, joint consultation and negotiation, wages and conditions of employment and introduction of the 'check-off'. The essence of this agreement was that, whilst giving the appearance of victory, it not only reinstated the old conditions but attempted to strengthen unstable bureaucratic control over the rank and file. Nonetheless, even as the board of inquiry deliberated, the Union prepared its claims in respect of

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<sup>56</sup> E.A.S. 6 July 1962: 'Industrial Strife still torments Kenya.'

<sup>57</sup> Within a few days of the report's publication, the board of inquiry into the sisal industry finally issued its findings and upheld the 1957 K.F.L. / F.K.E. agreement. Even so, the S.P.W.U. was dissolved on August 23rd and the new union registered the following day. Nonetheless, even well into September, many sisal employers were still refusing access rights to branch officials and collectors.

<sup>58</sup> K.N.A./PQ/39: Report of the Board of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Question of the S.C.P.W.U. being afforded Recognition by the K.C.G.A., July 1962.

<sup>59</sup> E.A.S. 13 July 1962: 'Growers and Union should meet soon, says inquiry board: recognition the aim.'

new terms and conditions which were described by the Labour Office as 'far fetched and ridiculous'.<sup>60</sup>

*Pay, Conditions and the Strains of the S.J.C.*

Tensions over pay and conditions surfaced during the course of several meetings of the S.J.C., reconstituted under the new recognition agreement held during September 6-17th. There was little substantive consensus on any of the principal issues concerning pay, rations, the standard working week, overtime, maternity leave and paid holidays. On the question of the 'value of the ration element', the Union wanted this to consist of meat and posho only 'issued equally according to their value up to the equivalent of 40/-'. The K.C.G.A. considered that there should be 'a balanced scale of rations' valued at 32/- per ticket or 28/- per month. It was agreed that workers on each estate should be at liberty to choose either a consolidated wage or a reduced wage 'plus an agreed ration element for that particular estate.' Whilst the two sides agreed that the standard working week should be Monday to Friday based on a standard eight hour day, they fell out over Saturday working when the K.C.G.A. refused to accept the Union's proposal to reduce labour time from seven to five hours. On overtime, it was agreed that Sunday working would be at 1½ time the basic rate, whilst Monday to Saturday would be paid at 1¼ times the basic rate. There was no agreement on paid leave, as the Union demanded thirty days with the employers conceding just ten days.<sup>61</sup>

The questions of pay and standard tasks revealed an unbridgeable gulf between the Union and the K.C.G.A. Whilst the principle of monthly pay<sup>62</sup> was agreed, no accord was reached on the principle of equal pay for equal work 'regardless of sex or age', or 'on the need, or possibility'<sup>63</sup> of fixing standard tasks for weeding, mulching, pruning, planting and grass cutting. In response to the Union's demand for a 2 debe standard task during flush periods, the K.C.G.A. offered 2 ½ debes or a higher rate per debe. The S.C.P.W.U.'s principal aim was for a uniform minimum wage of £15 a month for all its members in the coffee industry. The Union was 'convinced beyond doubt' that this was a minimum wage for 'a minimum standard of living' for the 'unskilled' coffee worker 'and his family'. When the K.C.G.A. rejected this demand, the Union asked them to present their production costs

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<sup>60</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Officer's Monthly Report, July 1962.

<sup>61</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24/Trade Dispute involving the S.C.P.W.U. and the K.C.G.A., 1962: Minutes of the 5th meeting of the Coffee Standing Joint Council, 17 September 1962.

<sup>62</sup> The daily rate was calculated on the basis of the monthly ticket divided by 30. The daily rate was then multiplied by 26 to arrive at the monthly rate.

<sup>63</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: Minutes of the 5th meeting of the Coffee Standing Joint Council, 17 September 1962.

to justify their alleged inability to pay. The K.C.G.A. attempted to show that the Union's claim would result in huge losses to the planters. It made out its case that on an average 200 acre coffee estate employing 120 workers, the Union's demand of 300/- per month over the course of a year would amount to a total expenditure of 432,000/-. Given that this estate produced an average of 6.6 cwt. of coffee per acre, at an average<sup>64</sup> of £275 per ton, a revenue of 363,000/- would accrue. This would result in a net loss of 70,000/-<sup>65</sup> before the additional costs of production were accounted for. Given the strapped position of its members, the K.C.G.A. had little to bargain over and was on course to impose wage cuts. On this basis, and to the Union's 'surprise', the K.C.G.A. were unwilling to offer any increase at all. The Union rejected this appraisal on the grounds that it had no access to the accounts of the 'entire' membership of the K.C.G.A. 'in order to be able to challenge such figures'.<sup>66</sup> The S.C.P.W.U.'s remonstrance at business secrecy raised the political principle that the industry's books should be open to inspection, an issue that the Union was to pursue at the forthcoming tribunal. By implication, no assessment of the industry's overall rate of profit could take place without access to detailed information relating to the individual capitals which made up the total capital of the coffee industry. Such a calculation could only be made by abstracting the average given by individual capitals taken as a whole. The K.C.G.A. seemed intent to pass the burden of their crisis onto the backs of the workforce as the minimum wage and other improvements were to be made dependent on the fluctuations of the world market and the quota system. Owiti believed the employers were out to "smash" the Union with the "intention" to "build a new state of cheap labour in Kenya ... My Union is therefore determined to break this employers' barrier in its entirety".<sup>67</sup>

After five days of discussion in the S.J.C. a deadlock was reached<sup>68</sup> on September 17th and the Union issued a strike notice. The K.C.G.A.<sup>69</sup> Chief Executive I.R. Price was anxious that conciliation proceedings start 'without undue delay'<sup>70</sup> and reported<sup>71</sup> the dispute to the Labour Commissioner. Price demanded that Owiti withdraw the strike notice on the grounds that it was in

<sup>64</sup> In respect of sales to quota, non-quota and local markets.

<sup>65</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: Minutes of the 5th meeting of the Coffee Standing Joint Council, 17 September 1962.

<sup>66</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42/Verjee Arbitration Tribunal: S.C.P.W.U. Tribunal Submission, 5 December 1962.

<sup>67</sup> E.A.S. 20 September 1962: 'Merger Hint by Unions.'

<sup>68</sup> E.A.S. 19 September 1962: 'Keep Agreement Growers tell Coffee Union.'

<sup>69</sup> By November 1962, the K.C.G.A. Represented 273 coffee producers, east of the Rift who held 31.3% of Kenya's total coffee acreage. These employed between 25,000-30,000 workers. The total number of permanent workers in the industry was estimated at 70,000. This was in addition to the casual labour employed by the industry during the flush picking period.

<sup>70</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: I.R.Price/ K.C.G.A. Executive Officer to S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 18 September 1962.

<sup>71</sup> Under clause 4 [vii] of the C.J.S.C. agreement.

contravention<sup>72</sup> of the procedure laid down in the August 22nd recognition agreement which effectively outlawed the right to strike whilst a dispute was 'under consideration'<sup>73</sup> by the S.J.C. or the Labour Commissioner. This reflected the provisions of the Industrial Relations Charter<sup>74</sup>, one of the principal pillars for Uhuru, with its stipulation that where a joint council failed to reach a settlement the dispute was to be referred to the Labour Commissioner. The latter believed, in *camera obscura*, that the Union was the uncompromising party with a position that did not 'leave much room for conciliation'. He put much store on the ability of the K.F.L. to make Owiti change 'the basis upon which he has negotiated so far.'<sup>75</sup> This had its desired effect, as the Union cancelled its strike call and agreed to conciliation.<sup>76</sup> The Labour Commissioner then identified an exhaustive range<sup>77</sup> of issues in dispute, with wages and standard tasks pre-eminent.

By the end of September, the position of the K.C.G.A. hardened as it pressed for a wage standstill, making the prospects for conciliation remote. Its chairman M.E. de La Hayes computed a detailed list of figures which claimed to reveal typical production costs. He argued that not 'less than 10% of the capital involved is considered a fair return to the planter' and maintained that it was 'a fact [his emphasis] that wages must not exceed 35% of the total production costs'. All things considered, he concluded that if prices declined below their current levels, 'employees in the European coffee growing areas must face the demand for reduced wages or further unemployment'.

<sup>72</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: Recognition Agreement between the K.C.G.A. and the S.C.P.W.U., 22 August 1962. Appendix A: C.S.J.C. Paragraph 4. [vii]: "When no settlement is reached by the Coffee Standing Joint Council, it shall be reported to the Labour Commissioner, for conciliation or arbitration or Board of Inquiry."

Paragraph 4 [viii]: "No withdrawal or lockout shall be resorted to by either party at any time whilst any dispute or matter is under consideration by the Coffee Standing Joint Council or the Labour Commissioner or an Arbitrator or Board of Inquiry. Thereafter if a strike or lockout is contemplated ten days written notice of the intended action shall be given to the other party."

<sup>73</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: I.R. Price/K.C.G.A. Executive Officer to S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 18 September 1962.

<sup>74</sup> The charter was finally agreed and signed on 15 October 1962. 'Strikes and Lockouts [ii]: "failing settlement at Joint Industrial Council, such dispute shall be reported forthwith by the parties concerned therein to their respective National Officials and be immediately jointly dealt with by them either by invoking Joint Disputes Commission procedures or by reference to the Chief Labour Officer." T.J. Mboya, *Freedom and After* [Nairobi, 1993], p. 264.

<sup>75</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: W.M.P. Heath-Saunders, Acting Labour Commissioner to K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, 20 September 1962.

<sup>76</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: R.A.J. Damerell, Acting Labour Commissioner to K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, 27 September 1962; Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance, section 4 [1] and the C.S.J.C. Agreement, section 4 [vii] and [viii].

<sup>77</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: R.A.J. Damerell, Acting Labour Commissioner to K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, 27 September 1962. Increase in wages for unskilled, semiskilled and skilled labour and certain supervisory staff; hours of work; overtime; number of paid gazetted holidays; length of probationary period; standard tasks; picking tasks; paid annual leave; gratuities; paid sick leave; medical treatment for non-working resident dependants; protective clothing; maternity leave; termination of service; check-off; rations and allowances in lieu.



Hayes was categorical 'that no case can be made out for any increase in the remuneration of adult males or juveniles this year'.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, in a move to split permanent workers from the casual labour force, the K.C.G.A. declared its willingness to narrow the differential between male and female wages. Whereas the adult male wage would remain stagnant at 65/- a month, women's wages would be slightly levelled up 'on compassionate grounds' from 52/- to 56/- a month.<sup>79</sup>

By early October, all conciliation in the dispute had failed. The parties were asked to consent to arbitration under a sole arbitrator, a course resisted by the K.C.G.A. Engulfed by crisis, the K.C.G.A. was desperate to secure the appointment of an arbitrator who would swing things its way. Even so, the arbitration ordinance did not require the Ministry<sup>80</sup> to obtain the parties acceptance of the appointed arbitrator.<sup>81</sup> The Chief Labour Officer, Ian Husband, was determined to be seen standing up to the K.C.G.A. and told their advocates that 'we are under no obligation to discuss with disputing parties who should be appointed as arbitrator'.<sup>82</sup> With only the consent of the Union, Husband used his powers to refer the trade dispute to arbitration<sup>83</sup> and appointed the advocate Jimmy Verjee<sup>84</sup> as arbitrator 'assisted by Assessors', to constitute an arbitration tribunal. In a concession to the employers, he made clear that the assessors would be nominated by and agreeable to 'both parties'.<sup>85</sup> The employers nominee for an assessor was as hard-line and reputedly partisan as any could be. Though there were 'immediate protests'<sup>86</sup> from the Union that Colonel Merritt was 'an interested party' and not eligible to function as an assessor<sup>87</sup>, it nonetheless accepted his nomination. A further retreat ensued as Owiti agreed to a revised agenda of just five items consisting of wages, hours, overtime, rations and allowances in lieu and agreed to drop all other issues from arbitration.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: M.E. de L. Hayes, K.C.G.A. Chairman, 'Memorandum on Cost of Wages and Conditions of Service on European Coffee Estates on a Minimum Production Basis', 24 September 1962.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Trade Union [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance, section 5.

<sup>81</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: Filenote by C.L.O. [Chief Labour Officer], Ian Husband to the Minister of Labour, 18 October 1962.

<sup>82</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: J.I. Husband to Messrs Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews, advocates for the K.C.G.A., 22 October 1962.

<sup>83</sup> Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Ordinance, Section 5.

<sup>84</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20/ Verjee Report, p.2. Verjee himself was hardly a neutral party. He held 1200 shares valued at £165 in Kamiti Valley Coffee Plantation Ltd., and 600 shares valued at £375 in Kakuzi Fibrelands Ltd.

<sup>85</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42: J.I. Husband to Messrs. Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews, 6 November 1962.

<sup>86</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: J.J. Addie/Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Labour, 31 October 1962.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: Filenote from L.O. to the C.L.O. re: Coffee Industry Arbitration, 18 October 1962.

### *The Union Splits Wide Open*

Within weeks of recognition, a deep fissure revealed themselves within the ranks of the Union. As the Union bureaucracy came under pressure from workers to make gains in a situation where the employers had no room for manoeuvre, Owiti came under attack from a rival faction led by Babu Kamau, the S.C.P.W.U.'s district organiser in Ruiru. Apparently, Kamau had been operating as a law unto himself and had refused to forward accounts and membership lists to head office 'for checking purposes.' In order to deal with his internal enemies, Owiti invited police intervention into the Union on the pretext that its funds collected by the Ruiru branch 'may probably not have been used for Union purposes'. The police were given the go ahead to 'take whatever action it may consider necessary'.<sup>89</sup>

This rivalry erupted to the surface at a conference of 'coffee workers throughout Kenya' attended by S.C.P.W.U. members from Nyeri, Thika, Ruiru and Kiambu, held on September 30th in Kiambu. Its aim was to formalise a split in the Union in opposition to the Owiti leadership. In a groundswell of discontent at the dictatorial style of the Owiti leadership and at the absence of a functioning executive 'responsible for formulating the policy of the Union', the delegates 'unanimously resolved' to disaffiliate from the sisal section. They complained that elections to appoint national officials had been blocked and that Owiti was running the Union on 'dictatorial lines', imposing decisions without consulting the rank and file. The conference registered its dissatisfaction at 'Head Office' which had 'completely neglected workers in general' and expressed concern at the recent events at Kiaora estate in Thika 'where workers were removed and evicted on the advice of the General Secretary'. Delegates also expressed concern at a circular issued by Owiti asking union branches to remit all their finances to Thika, which bore the stigma of the alleged embezzlement carried out by former C.P.W.U. officials. In this connection the delegates rejected the Union's Thika headquarters 'as a secure place to send their money' on the grounds that remittances had been 'misused' by officials there. The real source of the split was related to the contributions and distribution of resources within the Union and the ties of the Owiti leadership to the K.F.L. There was clear resentment that funds generated by the coffee section was being used to maintain the sisal section 'which makes small contribution and in most cases none at all'. The conference decided that 'money belonging to coffee workers shall be transferred'<sup>90</sup> to new union

<sup>89</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123/S.C.P.W.U.General Correspondence, 1962-3: Owiti to K.C.G.A. Chief Executive, 11 September 1962.

<sup>90</sup> K.N.A./ABK8/24: J.M.Kinuthia, S.C.P.W.U.Chairman's summary of conference resolutions, 30 September, 1962.

accounts. The conference finally resolved to break with the S.C.P.W.U. and constitute the Kenya Coffee Plantation Workers Union [K.C.P.W.U.], which would sever all ties with the K.F.L.

The delegates went on to elect officials, including Babu Kamau as general secretary, and to adopt a new constitution whereby the new union claimed to represent 'the interests of all employees engaged in coffee plantations...'.<sup>91</sup> The seriousness of these moves was underlined by the responsibility given to the newly elected executive committee 'to write all legal documents required to dissociate the coffee workers with the sisal workers and furnish the employers and the Government with full understanding of the coffee workers disapproval of the present union's set-up' by providing them and the former Union with the minutes, decisions and resolutions adopted by the conference and to 'explain all the bodies concerned that the coffee workers regard the former Union as not theirs....'.<sup>92</sup> The capitulation by S.C.P.W.U. leaders to the sectionalism and 'safeguards' demanded by the employers as a prerequisite for recognition, had created the conditions for such a predictable split. At this point it seemed as if the employers would have their 'industrial' unions after all.

The K.C.P.W.U. continued to attract more support at a meeting at Kiambu Social Hall attended by delegates 'from all coffee estates' in Kiambu on December 2nd, which resolved to disaffiliate from the S.C.P.W.U. and 'wholeheartedly support' the formation of a separate coffee workers union 'which will be working its policies in accordance with directions of its members'. The meeting instructed a representative to meet officials of the new union 'to be informed of its constitution, rules and policy' with a view to organising 'an inaugural meeting in Kiambu district for coffee workers to become members'.<sup>93</sup>

As the new union duly applied for registration, the Registrar invited objections<sup>94</sup> from the S.C.P.W.U.<sup>95</sup> and asked the new Union to justify the necessity of another trade union which proposed to represent similar interests to one already registered.<sup>96</sup> Mindful of arbitration proceedings which were shortly to commence, the Chief Industrial Relations Officer opposed its registration

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<sup>91</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: H.T. Pryor/ Registrar of Trade Unions to C.L.O., 1 November 1962.

<sup>92</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: J.M. Kinuthia, S.C.P.W.U. Chairman's summary of conference resolutions, 30 September 1962.

<sup>93</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: Kariuki Karanja/ Munyenye Estate to the Minister of Labour, 5 January 1963.

<sup>94</sup> M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Union Ordinance, Section 16[1][a]and[d][1952]. The Registrar was empowered to refuse to register any Union 'if he is satisfied that' "[d] any trade Union already registered is sufficiently representative of the whole or of a substantial portion of the interests in respect of which the applicants seek registration."

<sup>95</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, 11 November 1962.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

'despite reports that coffee workers in Kiambu and Ruiru have indicated their support...', and asked the Registrar to withhold his decision 'until you hear further from me'.<sup>97</sup> Mboya also entered the fray to address fears that the findings of the arbitration tribunal would be nullified by the existence of the troublesome 'breakaway'. He emphasised the prior claim of the S.C.P.W.U. to represent the interests of coffee workers to the tribunal due to its registration and stressed that the tribunal's findings would be binding 'on all employees of the coffee estates' represented by the K.C.G.A. Mboya reminded the new Union that it was neither registered nor did it have probationary status and warned it against any inclination to use the proceedings of the tribunal 'as a lever'<sup>98</sup> to win registration.

The split within the S.C.P.W.U. gave the employers the excuse they were looking for to put further obstacles in the path of a settlement. Would arbitration be worthwhile if there were doubts about the S.C.P.W.U. being representative of the majority of workers in the industry? The K.C.G.A. played up the internal upheavals within the S.C.P.W.U. for all they were worth and refused to consent to the appointment of the arbitration tribunal<sup>99</sup> on the grounds that its award would not be binding on employees 'who were not parties' to its proceedings. This further undermined the legitimacy of the Owiti leadership which was desperate for a 'victory' to retain its hold over a dwindling membership.

Whilst the emergence of the breakaway was a setback to the K.F.L.'s plans for an omnibus plantation union, its reflex was to tighten its grip by accelerating the process of amalgamation in an attempt to pre-empt the occurrence of further splits. To this end, leading officials from the S.C.P.W.U., the T.P.W.U. and the G.A.W.U. attended a joint meeting in Nakuru on October 13th to prepare 'for amalgamation of all Land Workers Unions' into a union that would represent more than 270,000 workers. Peter Kibisu gave assurances that the new union's constitution would contain safeguards that disputes in various industries would be internally settled and that strikes in one section would not automatically spread to the other.<sup>100</sup> An interim committee was set up to make the necessary preparations with Herman Odour from the G.A.W.U. appointed as its secretary and the date for amalgamation to be set before the end of January, 1963.

<sup>97</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Chief Industrial Relations Officer to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 13 November 1962.

<sup>98</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: T.J. Mboya to F.K.E. President, 16.11.62.

<sup>99</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: Messrs Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews to J.I.Husband/ C.L.O., 25 October 1962.

<sup>100</sup> E.A.S. 'Plan to Merge Four Trade Unions', 15 October 1962

### *The Class Struggle goes to Arbitration*

The Chief Labour Officer, Ian Husband, warned the K.C.G.A. that the accepted practice in Kenya for employers to implement new terms of service for their employees regardless of union membership had 'never yet been challenged'. He further drew their attention to the fact that they had afforded full recognition to the S.C.P.W.U. and reaffirmed its continuing legal status as the sole organisation<sup>101</sup> registered to represent workers in the sisal and coffee industry. The K.C.G.A. rejected this approach and again stood fast to its position that any award could only relate 'to those employees whose representatives have consented to the appointment of the tribunal'. Unwilling to compromise, the employers' organisation was determined to use the split in the Union as an obstacle to arbitration. They reaffirmed their position that 'a large number of employees'<sup>102</sup> represented by the K.C.P.W.U. 'could lawfully argue' that they did not consent to the arbitration and were not bound to its findings.

By the end of October, the Ministry of Labour were running out of patience. Husband now believed there was no alternative but for the Minister to press the K.C.G.A. to set aside its reservations about arbitration. What Mboya could not do was to consult the breakaway union, 'or the Labour on the estates allegedly dominated by it', in an attempt to obtain universal consent to arbitration. Otherwise, this would place great strains on the government's relationship with the K.F.L. and the latter's support for the Industrial Charter. It would also undermine the K.F.L.'s imminent plans for amalgamation and weaken its role as a transmission belt for the coalition's authority amongst its affiliates. Owiti's dictatorial style was itself a reflection of this imposed dominion and the emergence of the breakaway union an expression of opposition within the working class generally to the African 'majority' government. Thus the ministry decided to put the interests of the state before those of the K.C.G.A. and accept the registered union's consent to the tribunal 'on behalf of all employees' in the coffee industry. Furthermore, failing the employers' consent, Husband was prepared to impose arbitration and take administrative measures to ensure that all K.C.G.A. estates implemented its recommendations.<sup>103</sup>

The K.C.P.W.U., which had applied for registration, requested that the Minister of Labour allow its representatives to be admitted into the arbitration proceedings 'on behalf of coffee plantation workers'. Mboya refused, as he reminded the organisation that its claim to be a union was invalid

<sup>101</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24:J.I.Husband, C.L.O. to Messrs Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews, 26 October 1962.

<sup>102</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24: Messrs Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews, to C.L.O., 27 October 1962.

<sup>103</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/24:Filenote from C.L.O. to Permanent Secretary/Ministry of Labour, 31 October 1962.

since it was neither registered nor did it have even probationary status. He also warned the Union against using the proceedings of the tribunal 'as a lever' to gain registration.<sup>104</sup> Undaunted by this reprimand, the fledgling union petitioned the Arbitrator alleging that the S.C.P.W.U. 'no longer commands the support' of coffee workers and that, since the award would be binding on all workers employed on estates represented by the K.C.G.A., the tribunal should 'accept evidence from our officials who are workers in the coffee plantations'.<sup>105</sup>

By early December 1962, the arbitration tribunal had begun its work with an award expected at the end of January 1963. The matters requiring settlement more or less reinstated the exhaustive agenda that had been passed over in October. There was only one alteration with rations or 'allowance in lieu' now included in the Union's claim for a consolidated wage of 300/- a month.<sup>106</sup> As the Union resubmitted its pay claim and most of its earlier demands, so the K.C.G.A. restated its case against all of these. As the hearing commenced, business secrecy again became an issue as the K.C.G.A. advocate requested public exclusion when the accounts of coffee estates<sup>107</sup> were submitted in evidence.

The arbitrator, Jimmy Verjee, believed that the minimum wage was the most difficult question before the tribunal and was determined that it must be related<sup>108</sup> to the picking rate. The principal stumbling block to reaching an agreement were insoluble differences between the Union's long standing claim for 300/- a month and the K.C.G.A. refusal to go beyond the current 66/-.<sup>109</sup> The latter held fast to the sliding scale in full anticipation of a sudden and sharp fall in coffee prices which would herald wage cuts throughout the industry. Owiti conceded that he 'knew it would be impossible to pay 300/-', but 'wanted them to justify their inability to pay a higher wage'.<sup>110</sup> When the K.C.G.A. alleged that the labour costs of the industry amounted to approximately 37% of its total production costs, the Union insisted that they provide 'thorough proof'<sup>111</sup> in order to assess the apportionment of the remaining 63% of the industry's costs. The K.C.G.A. put aside its resistance to

<sup>104</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42 :T.J.Mboya to the President of Kenya C.P.W.U., 5 November 1962.

<sup>105</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:David Wahome Gitonga, Acting General Secretary of K.C.P.W.U.to J.Verjee/ Arbitrator, 10 November 1962.

<sup>106</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42: C.L.O. to R.J.Verjee, 6 November 1962.

<sup>107</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Filenote from J.I.Husband to Ownor / L.O. [Industrial Relations], 3 December 1962.

<sup>108</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20/ Verjee Report,p.17. In its evidence to the tribunal, the Union claimed that the minimum expenditure of workers on rations was shs.139/80 per month, a substantial advance on its previous claim for 40/- at the S.J.C. in September.

<sup>109</sup> Or 76/- for a thirty day ticket.

<sup>110</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tribunal, 4 December 1962.

<sup>111</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:S.C.P.W.U. Submission to the Tribunal.

generalisation to present a revised version of its earlier case to the S.J.C. This showed that on an 'average' 200 acre farm<sup>112</sup> which produced a total of 66 tons of coffee, at an 'average' yield of 6.6 cwt per acre<sup>113</sup> and with a workforce of 110 permanent labourers,<sup>114</sup> the average cost of producing a ton of coffee would be approximately £236. Assuming that the average price per ton achieved at auction was £257<sup>115</sup>, the producer, after paying charges and outgoings to the C.M.B., would obtain a nett average return of £236.49 per ton. Given this example and the Union's demand for 300/- per month, the K.C.G.A. alleged that the 'average' planter's annual wage bill would come to 415,360/-.<sup>116</sup> However, at £236.1 per ton return on 66 tons of coffee, the planter would receive just 312,180/- giving a loss, after wage deductions, of 103,180/-. This was before an exhaustive array of other costings<sup>117</sup> had been accounted for. If this example is to be believed, as it was by the tribunal, we can begin to appreciate the depth of the crisis facing these planters since, even at current wage levels and with all other deductions taken into account, the margin of profit had all but disappeared.

The issue of picking tasks revived long standing differences between the two sides. The K.C.G.A. were adamant that the standard picking task should be 3 and not 2 debes as upheld by the Union. The former argued that during flush periods this could be completed in three to four hours, and that thereafter 'a picker is fully capable of filling up to five further debes...'.<sup>118</sup> While the K.C.G.A. had previously agreed in the S.J.C. to compromise on the picking task at 2 ½ debes, it now insisted, in its evidence to the tribunal, on 3 debes as the 'absolute minimum.'<sup>119</sup> The tribunal's report emphasised the unevenness of productivity during the picking period according to where coffee was picked, ranging from 2 ½ debes in Kiambu with 'much higher' yields per acre, to Thika and Ruiru where the task was 3 debes. According to Verjee, workers preferred to pick where 'there is the

<sup>112</sup> An untypical 'example' since, as cited in the report itself, the K.C.G.A. represented 273 members with 43,394 acres of plantings. The average size of a member's coffee estate stood at 159 acres.

<sup>113</sup> The average yield on the Socfinaf estates was 8.5 cwts per acre, though we should offset this against the company's comparatively high rate of capital expenditure which stood at £60,000 for 1962.

<sup>114</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20/Verjee Report, pp.10-12. The K.C.G.A. considered that 0.55 permanent workers per acre, apart from the casuals who were assumed to pick two thirds of the crop, was the 'minimum necessary' to run an efficient coffee estate in Kenya. This ratio of 'man per acre' was apparently based on a 'complete operation', including planting, weeding, reaping, pruning and factory labour. On the Socfinaf plantations the average was slightly lower at 0.46 permanent workers per acre.

<sup>115</sup> This average was calculated from the combined sales to quota, non-quota and local markets.

<sup>116</sup> Assuming that 110 workers picked 22 tons of coffee, this was multiplied by 300/- over twelve months to give 396,000/-. Also assuming 550 debes of cherry per ton, the remaining 44 tons were picked by casual labour during the flush, hence 44 multiplied by 550 at 80 cents a debe to give 19,360/-.

<sup>117</sup> These included the costs of mechanisation, pest control, treatment and prevention of crop disease, spraying, cost of chemicals, upkeep of roads and drains, soil improvement, maintenance and depreciation of tractors and trailers, upkeep of drying lines, packing and despatching, maintenance of houses and care of tools, water supply, office supplies, management costs, rent, rates and insurances.

<sup>118</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20/Verjee Report, p.10.

<sup>119</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tribunal, 5 December 1962.

biggest flush' and that in order to attract labour, Kiambu planters had dropped the task from 3 to 2 1/2 debes.

Following the Government's own guidelines<sup>120</sup> which emphasised the physical impossibility<sup>121</sup> of setting standard tasks, the K.C.G.A. opposed this on the grounds that the conditions under which coffee was grown contained too many variables<sup>122</sup> to lend itself to the standardisation of tasks. Whilst the Union accepted that tasks such as weeding, pruning, mulching, planting and grass cutting varied from one district to another and even between different estates, it remained obdurate that they should be standardised throughout the industry. Such uniformity would facilitate collective bargaining and strengthen the role of the Union's bureaucracy. The S.C.P.W.U.'s submission argued that 'workers have complained to the Union that they would be more happy' if the weeding task could be regulated according to light, medium and heavy weeding. According to Owiti, this would 'not be difficult' to apply in Kiambu where the conditions under which coffee was grown was mostly evidently uniform, at least here 'there should be a standard task for each type'<sup>123</sup> of work. By implication, this attempt to measure the worth of labour power might then be applied to other districts. Nonetheless, with the exception of standard picking rates, the tribunal accepted the employers' submission and refused to award that tasks be standardised. Instead workers wages were to be set against market fluctuations founded on a far wider range of unpredictable variants.

The K.C.G.A.'s resistance to the standardisation of the component tasks of the labour process flowed from its determination to deal with 'industrial' unions. The two issues were inextricably linked. Sectionalism disabled unity in action and thought, and served to paralyse wage bargaining on an industry wide basis. If conditions were so unique and diverse then it would remain for workers on each estate to make separate deals with their employers. This meant estate by estate bargaining, where variants and comparables from other estates would be inadmissible to help the Union prepare its representation of the membership. This was intended to split workers up, exaggerate their separateness, to highlight their differences as opposed to their commonalities and insulate them from all outside influence. Here were the roots of tribalism and bureaucratic factionalism. Amongst workers themselves, the molecular processes of abstract comparison were well advanced as they

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<sup>120</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20/Verjee Report, cited *A Handbook of the Labour Laws of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya*, p.13.

<sup>121</sup> K.N.A./AMC 7/20/Verjee Report, p.22.

<sup>122</sup> For example, the climate and rainfall, size of the estate, nature of the soil and terrain, weed growth and the presence of couch grass.

<sup>123</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tribunal, 5 December 1962.



sought to measure their worth and present their generalisations on the value of labour power through the Union. Just as the comparative coefficients of coffee production were asserting themselves through the market, so too were those of the commodity labour power.<sup>124</sup> Whereas the K.C.G.A.'s harping about the unevenness of conditions served to immobilise such comparison, averaging occurred nonetheless as expressions of the material unity of the relations of production, distribution and exchange. These showed themselves as concrete types of plantation labour became more uniform and abstract, empowering standardisation and negotiation over the price of labour power.

Even though Verjee thought 'comparisons are odious', as state arbiter he was unable 'to completely ignore the fact that there should be some attempt made to standardise wages within the plantation industries, if that is possible or desirable'.<sup>125</sup> The tribunal overruled the Union's claim that the three debe task imposed 'undue physical burden'<sup>126</sup> on the worker and awarded that this picking task be standardised throughout the industry, though only during the flush period, in order to reduce competition amongst the employers for pickers. The tribunal also affirmed that tasks such as weeding, picking, mulching, planting and grass cutting should not be standardised.

The tribunal upheld that the picking rate would continue to be determined by the sliding scale, whereby the rate paid was tied to the nett average payout by the C.M.B. to planters during the previous season. If anything, the K.C.G.A. was more determined than ever to uphold this system as revealed in its submission to the tribunal where it stipulated that the amount of wages the industry

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<sup>124</sup> The way in which this was apprehended in the consciousness of employers and workers goes to the essence of our discussion here. Marx shows [*Capital Volume 1*, Chapter 1, Section 4: The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof] that in capitalist society, men confront each other only through the mutual exchange of equivalent commodities. Hence the value relations between the products of their labour which 'have absolutely no connexion with their physical properties and the material relations arising therefrom.' Whilst this is the appearance of things, it is nonetheless a necessary appearance, since social relations can only be concretised through the exchange of things according to their exchange value. At the same time, the spontaneous development of social consciousness takes these necessary appearances for the real relations, when they are actually an inversion of them. Men see their own social relationships as producers as relationships between things, the products of their labour. Here we see how appearance both expresses and at the same time conceals the essence of things. Whilst empiricism and pragmatism embrace these appearances as the 'accomplished fact', Lenin shows that the primary subject-matter of Marxist analysis consists of deciphering these social relations '...which take shape without passing through men's consciousness: when exchanging products men enter into production relations without even realising that there is a social relation of production there.' V.I. Lenin, *What the Friends of the People Are*, Collected Works Volume 1 [Moscow, 1971], p. 140. Collective bargaining between unions and the employers remain at this level of appearance where social relationships founded upon the extraction of surplus value from unpaid labour time remains hidden from view. Here the wage form disguises the value of labour as the value of labour power. This appearance extinguishes every trace of the division of the working day into necessary and surplus labour, into paid and unpaid labour time. Struggles over wages are restricted to the process of the circulation of labour power and the commodities which ensure its reproduction.

<sup>125</sup> K.N.A./ AMC 7/20/Verjee Report, p.9.

<sup>126</sup> K.N.A./ AMC 7/20/Verjee Report, p.16.

could afford 'hinges on the price of the commodity on the open market'.<sup>127</sup> The scale began at 55 cents a debbie where the payout to planters for the previous season had been £200-225 up to 100 cents where the payout was £476-500. Expressing a powerful sentiment amongst coffee workers, the Union made clear its opposition to the system which set wages in line with world prices since it had 'no control in market prices'<sup>128</sup>, a principle that was rejected by the tribunal. Nonetheless, it displayed ambivalence in its resolution that members would not 'be placed at the mercy and whim of the world market, as long as the minimum requirements of the workers...are not satisfied'.<sup>129</sup> This indicated that union leaders were prepared to live with the sliding scale, since there was no outright call for its abolition, provided that an understanding of what constituted the minimum could be arrived at and attended to. The Union supported its case by presenting the budget of 'an average family of a coffee worker'<sup>130</sup> consisting of a man, his wife and four children. Whilst Kibisu argued that the coffee worker should be paid 'on the same basis as an urban worker'<sup>131</sup>, the Carpenter principle of a 'family wage' was spurned by the tribunal.

The tribunal decidedly rejected the Union's demand for 3/- a debe as a minimum standard rate and awarded that the consolidated wage per 30 day ticket for an adult male worker would increase from 76/- to shs.80/50.<sup>132</sup> This was composed of a cash wage of shs.48/-, plus shs.32/50 as the value of rations, with workers to be given the option of cash in lieu of rations. This represented a raise of shs.4/50 per ticket or 5.92%. This meant that in the current season for a compulsory extra debe, permanent workers doing a three debe task during the flush periods, would see their pay rates rise from shs.2/53 per day to just shs.2/68, moving up from 85 to only 89 cents per debe whereas casual labourers would receive 85 cents a debe.<sup>133</sup> Given the continued existence of the sliding scale, even such a petty increase was menaced by a fall in world prices.

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<sup>127</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Reply of Hamilton, Harrison and Matthews to the S.C.P.W.U.

<sup>128</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:S.C.P.W.U. Submission to the Tribunal.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:S.C.P.W.U. Submission to the Tribunal. While the provision for food, household items, health and education were costed for the family, outgoings for clothing were based on the needs of the adult male worker alone.

<sup>131</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tribunal, 4 December 1962.

<sup>132</sup> Women's wages rose to 65/- and juvenile wages went up to 54/-, calculated at 4/5 and 2/3 of the male wage respectively.

<sup>133</sup> K.N.A./AMC 7/20:Verjee Report,p.17.

The tribunal's other awards were no less paltry and even consciously punitive. It awarded a 46 hour week and confirmed the overtime rates which had already been agreed in the S.J.C. The Union's grievance that overtime should be voluntary and not enforced, as implied by the K.C.G.A<sup>134</sup>, was not addressed by the tribunal. The tribunal's reprehensible concern for well being was revealed in its response to a range of problems facing workers. On maternity leave, whereas the Union had asked for 'at least' three months on full pay for permanent workers, the tribunal awarded two months leave without pay. On paid leave it awarded 14 consecutive days, about half of what the Union had demanded. Whilst there was an award of 30 days paid sick leave, the tribunal ruled against any entitlement by a worker's dependants to medical treatment. Though the tribunal was made aware of the Union's concern over the high incidence of fever and pneumonia amongst field workers, which it attributed to rain and bad weather generally, Verjee judged against the provision of rain-proof clothing. There were other negligible changes in gazetted holidays, length of probationary period and termination of service.

Though award took effect from February 29th 1963, it was not binding in the non-scheduled areas of coffee growing dominated by African producers who paid lower wages and inferior picking rates to their workers. Overall, the tribunal gave nothing substantial to the Union and certainly not enough to repair the ruptures within its ranks. On the contrary, the Verjee report presaged renewed divisions stemming from the leadership's incapacity to extract any worthwhile gains for its members. In fact, the tribunals recommendations were so far short of workers expectations that the split deepened, threatening both a setback to the K.F.L.'s amalgamation plans and to Mboya's course towards the corporate state.

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<sup>134</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/42:Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tribunal, 5 December 1962.

## *10. The K.P.A.W.U. and the Course towards Corporatism*

### *A Split and Divided Bureaucratic Stratum*

While the conclusions of the Verjee tribunal were awaited, final preparations for founding the omnibus union were made. Anticipating disappointment with the tribunal's report, the K.F.L. lost no time to tighten the rein over its land affiliates. The founding conference of the omnibus which was held in Nakuru on the January 5th 1963, agreed to a merger of the tea, coffee, sisal, and agricultural unions with a membership estimated at 270,000 workers in all. Trade union leaders from the three East African territories were in attendance as well as representatives of agricultural trade unions from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and from the I.F.P.A.W. based in Geneva. Kenya's ministers of labour, agriculture, commerce and industry were also present. As a result of the conference the S.C.P.W.U. and the G.A.W.U. decided to merge 'immediately', whilst the other unions were given time to wind up their outstanding affairs. The most decisive issue addressed by the delegates was that of sectional committees to insulate each industry from the problems arising in the others. The omnibus organisation applied for registration as the 'Kenya Union of Land Employees', where it spelt out the corporatist mould in which the Union was attempting to cast itself.

'Our desire to merge is motivated by the following factors:- 1. We feel that it is the duty of Trade Unions in a country to co-operate as much as possible with Governmental Authorities and Employers so as to formulate economic development plans and respect their implementations. This can only be achieved when unions are properly run in a responsible way. Such Unions must therefore be strong to be able to control its members, such a union should also be in a position to be represented in all National Statutory Bodies relative to the workers interest. 2. Kenya is mainly an agricultural country, and surely or doubtless to say, needs a unified Agricultural Workers' Policy which would match with the policy of Government of the day to ensure that economic chaos is minimised.'<sup>2</sup>

This was a blueprint for corporatism on the land in which the union leadership attempted to assuage fears that the merger might result in greater unity amongst workers themselves. The emergence of the omnibus was initially threatening to the employers, a spectre raising all their worst fears, for here was a movement that seemed to transcend all sectionalism by coming out for the interests of the agricultural proletariat as a whole, or so it appeared. However, there were other forces that whilst working hard to maintain such appearances amongst workers themselves, were also showing the employers an instrument which was more likely to guarantee differentiation.

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<sup>1</sup> E.A.S. 6 January, 1963, 'Plantation Unions Merger.'

<sup>2</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124/Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union, Registration and Constitution, 1963-4: Herman Oduor to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 17 January, 1963.

Nonetheless, an imposed unification was in progress which seems to have deepened the festering divisions within the union bureaucracy and provoked widespread opposition amongst plantation workers generally. Having been through one damaging experience of merger, workers were naturally apprehensive of yet another. We should take care to detach two separate issues here, the developing unity within the working class as a whole during this period, and the striving by the K.F.L. and its quislings in various unions to engineer 'uniformity' from above. This was not to promote the growing class cohesion, but to put themselves in a stronger position to harness spontaneous energies in order to pursue trade union demands along legal channels. Along this road the final aim would be to bind such a large group of workers to the state itself, hence the wide interest in this conference and the attendance of government ministers. Notwithstanding the tame trajectory, the omnibus union's application for registered status was rejected.<sup>3</sup>

Secessionist moves were fuelled by plans to make Owiti general secretary of the new omnibus. The attempt to bring them under an already discredited leadership seems to have inflamed the mood amongst workers in Kiambu. Kariuki Karanja, a worker at Munyenye Estate and former S.C.P.W.U. Branch chairman in Kiambu, claimed in a letter to the Minister of Labour that workers in the district were 'very much against' amalgamation. Commenting on the union officials involved, Karanja relayed that amongst workers in Kiambu it was felt 'strongly that the engineering of the Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union is a result of the failure of these leaders of developing individual industrial organisations; and having no other means of living they felt they could keep themselves going by centring all workers money in their head office'. Karanja concluded by giving notice 'that we, in Kiambu coffee estates, shall not affiliate to any union but want to remain industrial organisation for coffee workers alone'. There was also a warning to the 'so called interim leaders' of the omnibus 'not to attempt to come to Kiambu estates hoping to get coffee workers union affiliated to their unworkable amalgamated Union'.<sup>4</sup> This voice seemed to reflect both workers unrest at the imposed merger and the bureaucratic intent of the K.C.P.W.U. faction. Karanja sought to steer this discontent along the separatist path of an 'industrial union', even though the opposition to amalgamation in Kiambu had not challenged the principle of a unified organisation of land workers. If coffee workers had made a leap forward in founding the S.C.P.W.U., they were now taking a step back.

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<sup>3</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/124: H.T.Pryor, Registrar of Trade Unions to Oduor, 8 February, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: Kariuki Karanja, Munyenye Estate to the Minister of Labour, 5 January 1963.

The K.C.P.W.U. saw the opportunity to win a large number of members in Kiambu. This would bring in substantial subscriptions and strengthen the union's case for recognition and registration. The union wasted no time to come out against the Nakuru conference decisions. In a letter to the Registrar, the Union's president, J.M.Kinuthia, complained that the leaders of the various unions involved were out for 'personal prestige and not for the benefit of the workers, otherwise full consultation with the workers should have been made before the conference was called'. Kinuthia appraised the mood of Kiambu workers, suspicious and distrustful of imposed bureaucratic mergers,<sup>5</sup> as an indication of opposition to the amalgamation principle. He referred to the experience of the coffee workers involvement in the S.C.P.W.U., and since that 'proved a failure we don't envisage how better we would be if we amalgamate with the entire agricultural industry'. The source of Kinuthia's position was the desire by the K.C.P.W.U. for a captive membership and the subs this would bring in to sustain yet another faction of the labour bureaucracy in the making. Like Karanja, Kinuthia's was essentially the voice of a layer looking both ways at once, wilfully confusing opposition to the way amalgamation had been carried out with any form of unity with other sections of workers in order to canalise discontent into a secessionist union. Kinuthia concluded by appealing to the Registrar for an 'immediate approval of our application'<sup>6</sup> which was later refused<sup>7</sup> on February 19th. Fuelled by simmering discontent with the Owiti leadership, this occasioned renewed strife as bitter factional rivalries erupted yet again throwing the S.C.P.W.U. into 'complete confusion'<sup>8</sup>. This led to a major crisis which threatened to derail preparations for the omnibus entirely. At the centre of machinations were former K.C.P.W.U. 'officials' around Babu Kamau who had quickly re-emerged within the ranks of the S.C.P.W.U.

On February 17th the Union's Central Council sacked Owiti as general secretary 'instantly', giving as its reasons the 'intolerable activities you have carried on in the Union...'.<sup>9</sup> In a letter of protest to Shadrack Njoka, the Union's President, Owiti railed against the 'secret meetings' called during his absence on an organisational tour of the coast branches declaring them 'unconstitutional' and as 'null and void', and that he was prepared 'to challenge you and your group'. He threatened that Njoka's 'official position will cease, together with all your group in this Union...'<sup>10</sup>, and also drew attention

<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: Kamau to Registrar, 26 February 1963. Apparently at a meeting on February 10th, at Ndumbi in Kiambu, 4,500 workers had 'set on fire all cards' which belonged to the S.C.P.W.U.

<sup>6</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: J.M. Kinuthia K.C.P.W.U. President to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 8 January, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123/ S.C.P.W.U. General Correspondence 1962-3: Assistant Registrar of Trade Unions to B. B.M.Kamau, 14 March, 1963.

<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124 Kamau to Registrar, 26 February, 1963.

<sup>9</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Shadrack Njoka to K.F.L. General Secretary, 26 February, 1963.

<sup>10</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to Njoka, 19 February, 1963.

to the absence of delegates from Vipingo, Western, Nyanza, Thika and Nakuru branches from the 'secret alleged Central Council' meetings. Owiti rejected these proceedings as a tribal affair and challenged his detractors to bring their differences to a 'full executive' and a special conference where they could 'prove that workers have confidence in you'. Njoka affirmed the decision to dismiss Owiti and returned the charge of tribalism, 'the fact that you have taken your tribal men in all branches of the Union as organisers'. He warned Owiti against treating 'this Union as your tribal company' and that it was 'illegal to term your name as the official of this Union.' After instructing Owiti to 'leave this Union peacefully' and to 'look for another employment elsewhere'<sup>11</sup>, Njoka notified his dismissal to the Registrar.<sup>12</sup>

At a 'well attended'<sup>13</sup> general meeting of workers in Thika on February 24th, Owiti apparently overturned the decision and 'disposed of' Njoka 'together with all the office-bearers'. In an attempt to stir the waters, Babu Kamau sent the Registrar a list of monies totalling 5,070/- allegedly paid over to Owiti by the K.F.L. to assist the Union's coffee section, of which 'there is no trace or entry whatsoever in the Union books'.<sup>14</sup> It was one thing to bring these issues to the attention of the membership as part of a struggle for correct leadership in the Union, quite another to invite the Registrar into the fray to settle the issues in dispute. Both factions colluded to keep the issues well away from the rank and file. This was the bureaucratic way of resolving differences that characterised the internecine struggles throughout.

Locally, the Labour Office was thrown into confusion, 'At this juncture we do not know who has dismissed whom!', as it observed a union that was 'in a chaotic state and fraught with discord between the Kikuyu and Luo elements'. Tribal differences coincided with dissimilarities between workers based on the division of labour. Since a large proportion of workers in the sisal plantations were Luo 'it follows that Mr Owiti has considerable influence in this industry', whereas workers in the coffee industry were mainly Kikuyu and 'he has singularly little influence with them'.<sup>15</sup> This was compounded by loopholes in the provisions of the Trade Union Ordinance which enabled 'this endless game of payment of 10/- and the 7 signatories on the appropriate form'. Owiti proceeded to

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<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Njoka to Owiti, 20 February, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> K.N.A. / ABK /8/123: Shadrack Njoka / S.C.P.W.U. President to Registrar of Trade Unions, 20 February, 1963.

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./ VK/2/30/S.C.P.W.U. 1962-3:S.J. Okelo/ Thika Labour Officer to Kiambu Labour Officer, 18 April, 1963.

<sup>14</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: Kamau to Registrar, 26 February, 1963.

<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30/S.C.P.W.U. 1962-3:S.J. Okelo/ Thika Labour Officer to Kiambu Labour Officer, 18 April, 1963.

process his papers to the Registrar, which were accepted. He made out his case that the Central Council had no constitutional basis and that its decisions were illegitimate, and invited the Registrar into the special conference scheduled for March 10th to witness the election of the Union officials.<sup>16</sup>

Owiti was determined to stay on and oust his detractors. After convening a general meeting of branch officials and representatives on February 25th, he claimed that it had been resolved to dismiss Njoka for acting contrary to the Union's constitution and for 'conspiring with employers' against the Union.<sup>17</sup> Njoka shortly drew attention to a police investigation relating to the misappropriation of Union funds which he linked directly to Owiti.<sup>18</sup> He gave notice that the Union would 'check up everything, regarding funds spent...' by Owiti, and that a full report<sup>19</sup> would be presented to the K.F.L. The Kamau-Njoka faction also stood their ground and at the special conference insisted that it was Owiti who was 'no longer an official of this Union'. The K.F.L. was actively promoting the Owiti leadership and requested that the Union convene a further 'extraordinary or special conference' on March 17th to decide 'who should lead the Union'.<sup>20</sup> Kamau and Njoka reaffirmed Owiti's dismissal by 'a unanimous vote' of the S.C.P.W.U. Central Council and condemned the K.F.L.'s interference which had 'gone to the extreme...'. They added that, 'It is our conviction that you are assisting Owiti personally' and proceeded to declare that the Union had 'completely and unreservedly disaffiliated' from K.F.L.<sup>21</sup>

The K.F.L. was undoubtedly anxious about this struggle spreading to other trade unions and disabling plans for amalgamation. The special conference was chaired by the President of the K.F.L. and of the Union's nine branches, seven were represented by 19 delegates who 'decided unanimously to elect fresh officer bearers'.<sup>22</sup> The faction around Njoka and Kamau did not attend, enabling Owiti to manoeuvre a vote of confidence in himself. He played much on his role as founder of the Union to stir support amongst the delegates who seemed anxious to end the crisis of leadership and move on to confront the employers over a wide range of imminent issues. As a result, it appeared as if the Kamau-Njoka group were cleared out of the leadership and the Owiti clique reinstated under the auspices of the K.F.L. A list of new officials and members of the central council was duly submitted to the Registrar. Predictably, the K.F.L. leadership endorsed the decision, though the Ministry of

<sup>16</sup> K.N.A./VK/1/33: Thika Labour Office Monthly Reports, February 1963.

<sup>17</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Owiti to K.F.L. General Secretary, 25 February 1963.

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Njoka to K.F.L. General Secretary, 26 February 1963.

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Njoka to K.F.L. General Secretary, 27 February 1963.

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: Njoka to K.F.L. General Secretary, 11 March 1963.

<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: B.M. Kamau and Shadrack Njoka to the Registrar of Trade Unions, 18 March 1963.

<sup>22</sup> K.N.A./ABK 8/123: B.M. Kamau / S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary to Minister of Labour, 21 March 1963.



Labour was silent over the issue. In Thika, the Labour Office complained that it had not heard from the ministry 'as to who is' the general secretary of the Union, while the K.C.G.A. and K.S.G.A. had circularised their members that they should have no dealings 'with any person' claiming to be general secretary of the Union 'until such time that all Union troubles are sorted out...'.<sup>23</sup> Both sides had competed for recognition from the Registrar who in turn studiously resisted the invitation to become embroiled in the matter. To be sure, the state wanted the split resolved in its favour but it waited on the K.F.L. to facilitate the work of resolution. Mboya was anxious that government favour to the Owiti group should be veiled by the K.F.L. and not be seen as his own work.

Kamau accused Mboya of tribalism and a 'misuse of your ministerial position' in giving his support for the K.F.L. conference, by declaring that the meeting held under the auspices of the K.F.L. was legal, and again re-emphasised the constitutional nature of Owiti's dismissal. Kamau also reproached Mboya for backing a Luo group in the K.F.L. led by Kibisu which included Owiti and threatened to take the factional struggle to the membership, with the threat that it would 'be very difficult for us to restrain the workers from taking any appropriate steps necessary to see that leadership is not imposed to them'.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the intervention of the K.F.L. to reinvigorate the Owiti leadership, the latter's notice to the Sisal Employers Association [S.E.A.] of the Union's intention to call an industry wide strike alarmed the F.K.E. and raised doubts about whether the K.F.L. had resolved the crisis after all. David Richmond, the F.K.E.'s Executive Officer, made clear that employers were unable to deal either with Owiti 'or any other so-called General Secretary until this position has been completely cleared' and urged action in conjunction with the Registrar to ensure that 'a stable set of officials' were elected.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, as the Union withdrew its report of a dispute in sisal industry, the Ministry of Labour felt secure enough to allow the situation to ride in the hope that the K.F.L.- Owiti faction would gain the upper hand.

The S.C.P.W.U. Central Council met on April 7th at the K.F.L.'s Solidarity Building, though once again Njoka and Kamau were absent. The Union's president referred to the 'present chaotic situation' and the need to 'take drastic steps in order to restore the leadership in the Union'. The overwhelmingly Luo council then reaffirmed Owiti's reinstatement and agreed that the Union's

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<sup>23</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: S.C.P.W.U. President to K.F.L. General Secretary, 23 March, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: B.M. Kamau / S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary to Minister of Labour, 21 March, 1963.

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: D.Richmond to Chief Labour Officer, 27 March, 1963.

headquarters be moved to Nairobi 'due to perpetual trouble in the present area where the HQ is situated'.<sup>26</sup> The council also passed a resolution condemning the Registrar, the Minister of Labour and sisal employers for disregarding union officials newly elected under K.F.L. supervision which it linked to 'the Government's *dramatic departure* [its emphasis] by entertaining the splinter groups existence as a Union'. Referring to the expired strike notice in the sisal industry it warned that a general strike would take place 'anytime from now...'.<sup>27</sup>

There was significant opposition in the branches to the way that the crisis of leadership had been handled. In Machakos a group of local officials, including branch secretary William Ochieng, were dismissed at a branch meeting 'because of forming a group to spoil the Union'. This was occasioned by allegations against Owiti and Ochieng of misappropriating branch funds. The new branch secretary, Josphat Musau opposed 'very strongly' the K.F.L.'s support for 'a group of self styled officials who theft Unions money from this office branch and made the Union weak and poor too'. While Musau appealed to the K.F.L. to enquire into the matter, 'I as a leader of workers realise that there are some officials of the K.F.L. who are not working for interest of K.F.L. but to their own benefits and also they did not want some tribes to be in the trade unions movement'.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst the crisis of leadership tore the Union apart, it was largely confined and carried on within the ranks of the union bureaucracy with only occasional appeals to the members. This was not a contest over principles and any turn to the members was fraught with the risk that these might actually be raised. This was a prospect that neither faction dare risk and were quite content to have their internecine squabbles perceived and portrayed as the expression of tribal divisions in order to secure their 'own' authority amongst different groups of members. Furthermore, it seems likely that Mboya was orchestrating matters to secure the victory of his own faction around Owiti, which gave an apparent Luo identity to this grouping.

### *Separatists and Secessionism Abound*

Even by mid-April, the crisis of leadership continued to be in abeyance with the rival cliques still at war. The Kamau faction based in Thika, was found trying to broaden its base by recruiting African civil servants from the Ministry of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Services, which the Labour Office

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<sup>26</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Minutes of S.C.P.W.U. Central Council Meeting, 7 April, 1963.

<sup>27</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Resolutions of S.C.P.W.U. Central Council Meeting, 8 April, 1963.

<sup>28</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Josphat Musau / S.C.P.W.U. Acting Branch Secretary / Machakos to K.F.L. General Secretary, 16 April, 1963.

judged as 'acting outside their jurisdiction'.<sup>29</sup> By the end of April, the S.E.A. seems to have recognised the Njoka-Kamau group as the legitimate leadership and circularised its members to grant access rights whilst refusing them to any Union officials associated with Owiti.<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, the K.C.G.A. moved in the opposite direction towards an accommodation with the Owiti faction, only to perform a 180 degree turn to recommend to its members that the Njoka-Kamau clique be recognised as the leadership.<sup>31</sup> Both groups of employers were attempting to tear the Union apart, undermine the course towards amalgamation, and establish their 'industrial unions'.

In a statement reported in the press Owiti accused the Government of allowing 'two officials to run one Union' and asked Mboya to give a ruling 'as to who is' the legitimate general secretary of the Union. In a letter to Mboya, Kamau stressed Owiti's constitutional right of appeal for reinstatement 'through the proper channels, by passing through this Union - but not through Newspapers'. Now sensing his vulnerability, Owiti had taken the struggle into the media and turned on his mentors. He was now more dispensable than ever. As soon as the employers had made up their mind for them, he was dropped by the K.F.L. Kamau now threw away yesterday's position, embraced the K.F.L. and became a spokesman for the omnibus as he declared 'our present stand ... for the unification of all plantation workers. We have no desire of splitting the Unions. We abhor "Majimboism" in Trade Unionism'.<sup>32</sup> He issued a pointed mission statement which stressed the unity of all plantation and agricultural workers in 'one powerful Union with a unified policy on the whole agricultural industry. The merger of our segmented unionism is now overdue...'.<sup>33</sup> As the Kamau-Njoka clique gained the upper hand, the S.C.P.W.U. apparatus underwent something of a purge as the appointment of branch officials for the Coast province, Ruiru, Nakuru, Nyeri, Kiambu, Thika and Machakos revealed a predominance of Kikuyus.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, Mboya was exercising more restraint than ever.<sup>35</sup>

With the Owiti group defeated, they attempted to split the Union yet again by reviving the S.P.W.U. The Registrar refused registration on the grounds that the S.C.P.W.U. was already existent to represent sisal workers.<sup>36</sup> Paradoxically, strongest support for the move came from the

<sup>29</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: S.J. Okello/L.O. Thika to Charles Munene / S.C.P.W.U., 18 April, 1963.

<sup>30</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to the Ministry of Labour Industrial Relations Officer and the Sisal Employers Association of Kenya, 28 April, 1963.

<sup>31</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: I.R. Price/K.C.G.A. Chief Executive to S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 22 May, 1963.

<sup>32</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: B.M. Kamau to Minister of Labour, 2 May, 1963.

<sup>33</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: Babu Kamau S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary to S.L.O./Central Province, 5 May, 1963.

<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: S.J. Okello/ Thika L.O. to S.L.O./Central Province, 21 June, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: B.M. Kamau to Chief Industrial Relations Officer, 11 May, 1963.

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: H.T. Pryor/Registrar of Trade Unions to S.C.P.W.U. General Secretary, 14 June, 1963; M.R.C./MSS 292/967.1/6: Trade Unions Ordinance section 16 [1] [1952].

S.C.P.W.U. branch in Machakos which had previously come out against the Owiti faction. At a branch meeting held on June 23rd, members were informed that they had been called together 'for the purpose of reviving' the S.P.W.U. 'due to confusion' created by Njoka and Kamau in the S.C.P.W.U. It was 'unanimously agreed' that all branch officials should resign and join the revived S.P.W.U. and that Babu Kamau 'be warned not to go to any sisal estates in the Machakos district'. The meeting resolved to approach the sisal employers to begin immediate negotiations since 'it is only a revival of the old Union which they had recognised'.<sup>37</sup>

According to the minutes of a general meeting called by Thika branch, also on June 23rd, 'over 1000' workers attended from all the sisal estates in the Makuyu division. Once again, it was alleged that 'the present confusion' had been created by the Union's coffee section. A motion was 'unanimously passed' that S.C.P.W.U. membership cards be burned and that the S.P.W.U. be revived. It was also 'unanimously passed' that Apollo Owiti be recognised 'as the only leader of the sisal workers'. Owiti apparently then 'asked the people if they wanted sisal/coffee union anymore and the answer was NO.' The meeting resolved to bar Kamau from the sisal estates and that the police be warned that any visits by him 'may cause a breach of the peace'. It was finally agreed that the sisal employers be approached by the Union to start negotiations on new terms and conditions of service 'immediately' and that 'any secret negotiations' between Kamau and the employers 'should be treated as useless'.<sup>38</sup> This was reference to Kamau's orchestration of the sisal pay claim which had provoked the split.

At a further meeting to found a branch in Nakuru, Ekola Ogila from Majani Mingi sisal estate was elected chairman and underlined the 'challenging job of getting back our old Union.. that did a lot for us during its time before we were pushed to amalgamate with coffee workers'. A motion was moved to 'disassociate ourselves with workers in the coffee industry', to refound the S.P.W.U. and set up an office, and have 'nothing completely to do with coffee workers'.<sup>39</sup> Branch officials were elected and it was agreed that no more dues would be paid into the S.C.P.W.U. The apparent support for the secessionist move amongst workers in Machakos, Thika and Nakuru to revive the defunct union were in part an expression of frustration at the bitterness of the factional rivalries that were tearing the S.C.P.W.U. apart. Consumed by its internal squabbles the S.C.P.W.U. had been paralysed in

<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Minutes of a S.C.P.W.U. Machakos branch meeting signed by Paul Musembe/branch chairman, 23 June, 1963.

<sup>38</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: S.P.W.U. Thika branch minutes of a general meeting for separation, signed by Dola Obiero/branch chairman, 23 June, 1963.

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Minutes of S.P.W.U. branch meeting, signed by Ekola Ogila/branch chairman, 23 June, 1963.

face of the many urgent problems preoccupying the lives of its members. As things stood, workers had no effective organisation to represent them. Nonetheless, it was the defeated faction that played on this frustration by attempting yet a further 'breakaway' in a last ditch attempt to save itself.

Dominic Ajwang Ouya, the S.P.W.U. 'interim' general secretary, appealed to the Registrar that he was 'very anxious for the immediate registration' of the organisation. He denied that the revived union was 'a mere splinter group', argued that the amalgamated union had 'proved beyond any doubt impracticable', and called for separation as the 'best solution'. His intention was to assuage the employers and the state by offering them the 'industrial union' they wanted, and to reassure them that 'this was one of the most peaceful unions'. Ouya's cry was against amalgamation, always and forever against amalgamation. The old S.P.W.U. had never wanted this, he claimed, it had been forced on the organisation by the K.F.L. following the Government's decision to de-register the C.P.W.U. Ouya complained that this had brought a setback to the sisal workers, 'by confusing the activities and good representation' established by the S.P.W.U. with the alleged corruption of the coffee union. He chose to ignore the fact that the C.P.W.U. had been a haven for the sisal union throughout most of its short existence. The coffee union had carried the S.P.W.U. giving it the use of its offices, officials and funded the fledgling at risk to its continued registration. In essence, the two unions had been amalgamated from the start in all but name.

To justify this secessionist course, Ouya drew attention to the fact that 'it was the coffee workers' under Kamau's leadership that in September 1962 had first gone down this road. According to Ouya, this move 'was only defeated narrowly' and since then 'there has never been peace in the amalgamation'. Apparently, Kamau's reasons for separation at the time had been because wage negotiations by the coffee section had been supposedly 'delayed by the obstinacy of the sisal employers'. Ouya now indicated that the wages question was also the key issue in the decision to revive the S.P.W.U. Apparently Kamau had colluded with the Chief Labour Officer to drop the pay claim for the sisal industry submitted by Owiti, the then General Secretary, and suspend negotiations over a wage increase. Ouya alleged that the Kamau-Njoka faction had caused the 'breakdown of our union'. He referred to ambiguities in the Trade Union Ordinance which facilitated the split by allowing the 'splinter group a chance of buying leadership' with just an application form for registration and an administration fee of 10/-, without support amongst the membership.<sup>40</sup> He then disclaimed any further connection between sisal workers and the S.C.P.W.U. The split seemed

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<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./ABK8/123: Dominic Ajwang Ouya / S.P.W.U. Interim General Secretary to Registrar of Trade Unions, 27 June, 1963.

irrevocable. Ouya informed the S.E.A. that the S.P.W.U. had been refounded and warned that since the wage claim previously advanced by Owiti had been withdrawn by Kamau, 'our Union' would not recognise any negotiations or agreements entered into by 'the splinter Group'.<sup>41</sup>

On June 28th, came an intervention from the K.F.L. which affirmed to the Registrar its plan to merge the agricultural unions and made strong objection to the registration of the S.P.W.U. which would involve going 'back on this policy'.<sup>42</sup> Owiti the separatist, again in a letter to the Registrar, marked his card of opposition to the omnibus preparations on the grounds that it was 'completely impossible, for another five years'. He emphasised the 1957 agreement between the F.K.E. and the K.F.L. relating to trade union organisation on an 'industrial basis' and acknowledged that the S.C.P.W.U. had 'broke this barrier'. However, this had been undermined by Kamau who 'became very tribally ambitious' and 'started splitting' the Union during negotiations on terms and conditions in the coffee industry, and initiated the breakaway K.C.P.W.U. Nonetheless, Owiti indicated his agreement with the F.K.E. that plantation workers were not mature and well organised enough 'to be able to understand the policy' of an omnibus union. 'This is true...', he said. In urging the registration of the 'separate' union, 'as the Unions were registered 1959 separately'<sup>43</sup>, Owiti stressed that conditions of work in the sisal and coffee industries were 'completely different', as were the 'workers tribe in the two industries'. The upshot of Owiti's appeal was the Registrar's refusal to entertain the Union's application. Dumped by the K.F.L., by the end of July Owiti's career in the trade unions seemed all but finished.

How do we explain the fact that the spokesmen for separatism were also at various times advocates of unity and amalgamation? The zigzags, twists and turns, of various layers of the bureaucratic stratum expressed extreme tension and unease at the contradictory demands of their intermediate position, since the margin of compromise with the employers had all but disappeared. The rival factions staggered about within the boundaries of unresolved contradiction. Hence, no sooner had the sisal and coffee sections separated and the amalgamation dumped, than it was being revived again. Furthermore, after the divorce taken place, the contending parties moved towards reconciliation within an all encompassing omnibus. The shifting positions on both sides were determined by a combination of subjectivism, narrow vision, pragmatism, expediency and opportunism. It was this

<sup>41</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Dominic Ajwang Ouya / S.P.W.U. Interim General Secretary to S.E.A. Secretary, 27 June, 1963.

<sup>42</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Dominic Ajwang Ouya / S.P.W.U. Interim General Secretary to S.E.A. Secretary, 27 June, 1963.

<sup>43</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Owiti to Registrar of Trade Unions, 11 July, 1963.

conjunction of elements, falsely labelled 'tribalism' that fed the petty rivalries and unprincipled manoeuvres of factional politics, always carried on at a safe distance from the rank and file. All sections of the bureaucracy laid bare their plans and intentions at the court of appeal that was the Registrar's office. On all accounts the state was to be kept informed, but there was no such effort for, or appeals to, the membership.

The omnibus K.P.A.W.U. finally reapplied for its registration on August 16th which was again rejected by the Registrar on petty technicalities, principally that the 'certificates' indicating ballot results had not been dated. More serious was the Registrar's rejection of the application on the grounds that less than 50% of the membership had voted in a secret ballot, just 7,920 S.C.P.W.U. members out of a registered membership of 25,464, prompting a further vote.<sup>44</sup> Towards the end of the month, the Registrar was satisfied that the new union had met all the conditions for registration and had sufficiently moulded its constitution to provide for the sectional interests of the four industrial groups represented by the Union<sup>45</sup>, and to allay fears of unified and uncontrolled strike action. The K.P.A.W.U. was registered on August 22nd and decided to locate itself in Nakuru, midway between Kenya's coffee and tea growing areas. The Union issued a mission statement stressing its corporate obligations and 'national duty'. 'A new nation, namely Kenya is being born. It is like a new house to be built, and we are all workers under one Contractor. Some people must transport stones, some fit doors and glasses, some lay stones and roofing, and some will enjoy sleeping on golden beds inside the house.' Above all else the Union would be 'an economic instrument for the whole nation'. It explained that the 'factors for Unity' would be the 'check-off' system, closed shops and educational programmes for members which would also involve the employers. This revealed its acceptance of the 'facts of life' underlying 'Uhuru' relating to the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie who 'will enjoy sleeping on golden beds'.

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<sup>44</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: J.G. Knaggs Assistant Registrar of Trade Unions to K.P.A.W.U. General Secretary, 19 August, 1963;

M.R.C./MSS/292/967.1/6: Trade Unions Ordinance, section 32 [1952]. This required three conditions prior to amalgamation [a] a secret ballot [b] a vote involving the participation of at least 50% of the membership and [c] an overall percentage of at least 20% of the voting membership in favour.

<sup>45</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: K.P.A.W.U. Constitution and Rules. The substance of these guarantees were specified in Rule 9, that for 'the purpose of negotiating agreements with employers or their organisations, and to protect sectional interests', the Central Council would appoint from its members, four negotiating committees covering tea, coffee, sisal and general agriculture. 'Each of the negotiating committees shall be competent only to negotiate on behalf of the industry with which it is concerned.'

The K.P.A.W.U. tried to pacify the fears relating to the amalgamation 'of once sectoral unions' and stressed that its constitution provided for 'separate agreements' on issues such as the minimum wage for different categories of workers. It laid out its immediate plans for a 'big and financially stable' union which 'will always be responsible...'. The Union also made 'it clear that our major aim is to be a realistically responsible organisation, and to achieve this goal we must get means of being more united so as to be able to discipline our members against: [1] emotional reactions against employers [2] Premature strikes [3] unrealistic demands which do not match the economy of the nation'. This formula was calculated to send the message to the employers and the government that the K.P.A.W.U. would suppress spontaneity and give guarantees against the occurrence of wildcat strikes.

The Union tried to underline its loyalty to things as they were and its respect for the rights of the employers. 'We know when we deposit in the Bank, we need profits, or interest, so are the employers'. It stressed the owners 'rights to associate' and advised that they should also 'merge under one Union, so as to make dealings easy' and that 'the earlier they merge the better'. The K.P.A.W.U. was also careful to recognise the employers rights to hire and fire under the Industrial Relations Charter, and offered its assistance to discipline workers 'through the Union's polished rules'.<sup>46</sup> This memorandum seems to have been intended as an affirmation of agricultural corporatism in which the Union offered itself as a transmission belt for the employers authority.

Had the omnibus really changed anything? It seemed as if there were still four separate unions, though now within the womb of a single union. Far from marching separately and striking together, this was much more the case of appearing to march together but striking separately, if at all. To some extent, things would go on as before since the 'policy of the new union will be that all agreements that were made between all the old unions will carry on as if the new amalgamation had been the signatory to them'.<sup>47</sup> Each section would do its own thing as if nothing had happened. So, that while the form had changed, the content remained essentially unaltered. Even though there were four components to this Union, these were down sized to make room for a singular apparatus. Branches, districts and regions were therefore to be closed down. In place of four union bureaucracies, only one was now required, so that at the local level one branch secretary was responsible for all sections of the Union. Hence, the omnibus was not primarily intended to facilitate expansion and

<sup>46</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: K.P.A.W.U. General Secretary, memorandum to employers in tea, sisal, coffee and mixed agriculture, 23 August, 1963.

<sup>47</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: S.L.O./ Rift Valley Province to L.O.s' /all districts, 27 August, 1963.



recruitment, but to consolidate the authority of a parasitic bureaucracy. To a large extent, the incidence of factionalism was about which sections of the bureaucracy would survive this rationalisation as more than a few officials would inevitably lose their comfortable berths. The essence of the omnibus then was an attempt by the trade union bureaucracy to consolidate itself, with its powers of office concentrated and centralised into fewer hands. Furthermore, it was growing to be one with the state itself, not the mythical state elevated above classes but one with a direct presence in the workplace mediated by the trade unions themselves. The Ministry of Labour essentially conceived the amalgamation of as a policing instrument that union leaders would wield on behalf of the state in which the omnibus would maintain just the veneer of independence. Nonetheless, the process of amalgamation was rough and uneven, as the struggle over its terms and conditions coincided with widespread challenges to the Verjee award. Let us now turn to a review of some of this terrain.

### *Workers Opposition to the Imposed 'Unity'*

Unrest and indignation at the restructuring and the way that it had been bureaucratically engineered, evoked strong protests from Machakos. As part of the reorganisation, the whole of Eastern Province was designated a 'district' with only a single branch. Pius Makau 'on behalf of Eastern Regional Leaders', addressed the K.P.A.W.U. general secretary 'to inform you of the following complaints'. He urged that the region 'was not a district and has got many workers', 'about' 30,000 union members in all. With the number of branches reduced, Makau conveyed the local concern that the members voice would be hardly audible in such a large organisation. One branch was inadequate for an entire region nor could it give satisfactory expression or representation to such a large number of workers. To 'make the communication to be easier', Makau recommended that seven branches be founded in the region at Kibwezi, Ulu, Donyo Sabuk, Ithanga nyeri Yatta, Embu, Athi River and Machakos. There were also organisational problems to relating to branch meetings and workers travelling long distances to reach them and at great expense. One branch for such an area would lend itself to a minimum of workers' involvement, casting a passive and docile membership not only easier to control, but susceptible to blame in the event of setbacks. Moreover there was no deputy general secretary responsible for the region as in other areas and 'no car for organisation'.

There was more criticism levelled at the K.P.A.W.U. leadership, which had allegedly appointed union officers in the region 'in a secret and underground as stooges' as part of its scrupulously handpicked hierarchy of union secretaries. Makau protested that the area had 'people who have knowledge as union leaders but we cannot understand why they were ignored and we feel that they have ability to control this region'. This seems to be a reference to a layer of experienced activists who had been locked out by the changes, since they were too close to the members to be reliable in upholding what had been designated as a pillar of the emergent corporatism. There then followed a strong reaction to the process of amalgamation, whose preparations had been held 'in secret and no one of us who was invited to hear how the appointments in regions and in branches shall be...'. There were also the seeds of a split in Makau's protest relating to union subscriptions and the way these resources had been deployed, since 'all the money which shall be collected in this region shall pay Nyanza, Rift Valley, Central and Coast Regions', and 'this is highly rejected by the leaders of this region'. Makau gave the union leadership seven days to recognise the Eastern region 'as well as other regions', by establishing the proposed seven branches and to submit the names of regional officers 'but not you to appoint any stooge in this area'.<sup>48</sup> The omnibus was a K.F.L. inspired vehicle, with a concentrated apparatus to discipline plantation workers and strangle their independent expression. Its aim was to dissolve the plantation unions into an instrument of the state machine. Hence the K.F.L.'s manoeuvrings to determine a new composition of leadership behind the back of the unconsulted rank and file.

Serious fissures shortly emerged within the Union's tea group, once again a further reflection of protest at the bureaucratic 'unification'. A 'National Union of Tea Plantation Workers' emerged linked to a distinctly secessionist trend in the local leadership of the K.P.A.W.U.'s Kericho and Sotik branches.<sup>49</sup> There were also some signs of complicity on the part of the employers in the attempt to form a splinter union.<sup>50</sup> In Kericho, where most workers were either Luyhia, Kisii or Kalenjin, there seemed to be more than a little resentment at the dominance of a Luo elite within the Union around Odour. In promoting this layer, some Kipsigis and Kisii union officials had been discharged. Once again, we should take care to identify the coincidence of tribal affiliation and the factional politics of the various tendencies competing within the bureaucratic stratum.<sup>51</sup> These differences were brought

<sup>48</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: Pius Makau on behalf of Eastern Region leaders to K.P.A.W.U. General Secretary, 15 September, 1963.

<sup>49</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/124: Joseph Arap Cherus/branch secretary/ K.P.A.W.U. to Minister of Labour, 22 January, 1964.

<sup>50</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: John Atiang / Deputy general secretary./K.P.A.W.U. to Manager Buret Tea Co. Ltd., 25 January, 1964.

<sup>51</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/124: Cherus to Permanent Secretary/Minister for Labour and K.F.L Secretary General,

to the attention of the Minister of Labour by Opar Mboya who took it upon himself as 'one of the workers' representatives' in the K.P.A.W.U. 'to address your Ministry on a very vital subject in connection with the... differences of leadership' in the Union's Kericho branch. Opar argued that the 'root cause of this misunderstanding' was brought about by 'the hurried amalgamation'.<sup>52</sup> Following other appellants, Opar invited state intervention into the fray of an internal union dispute, but it would not heed. The Ministry of Labour's Permanent Secretary R.A.J. Damerell pointedly refused to become involved on the grounds that 'there is nothing in the present legislation controlling trade unions' that allowed the Ministry to become directly involved in an internal union dispute, and 'while I appreciate your difficulties I can only recommend that you pursue your problems within the constitution of the K.P.A.W.U.'<sup>53</sup> Damerell redirected the conflict back into a union that had already been transformed into a bondsman of the state.

Calls to the Minister of Labour to intervene in internal union disputes was the hallmark of this and all previous factions. That the state was reluctant to become involved in response to every faction's appeal was an indication not of its elevation above the contending parties, but of support for its own faction in the K.F.L. leadership which had entrenched itself in the K.P.A.W.U. bureaucracy. Whilst the state's margin of intervention was partially determined by the need to maintain the appearance of some distance between itself and the affairs of the trade unions, its overriding aim was to secure the dominion of its K.F.L. faction linked to Tom Mboya. Hence the Union's constitution could be referred to as the framework for sorting out internal differences, since this had already been shaped by the rigorous requirements of the Registrar's office. And so, far from standing aside or above, the state sought to exercise its control<sup>54</sup> if anything more concertedly, if less visibly, than ever before. Above all else, the state had to take care to maintain the semblance of an independent trade union whilst transforming it into an extension of itself.

Prior to the K.P.A.W.U.'s registration, the employers had sought to take advantage of the union's internal divisions and the absence of a functioning leadership to ride roughshod over the Verjee award. This was reflected in the increased incidence of dismissals and widespread attempts by the employers to increase task work. This provoked a new phase of plantation strikes around Thika

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1 March, 1964.

<sup>52</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124:enclosure 36.

<sup>53</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: Joseph Arap Cherus / K.P.A.W.U. branch secretary to Minister of Labour, 22 January, 1964.

<sup>54</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/124: E.N.Mwendwa / Minister of Labour and Social Services to Joseph Cherus, 6 March, 1964.

during June-September<sup>55</sup>, centring on the Socfinaf estates which had been 'unduly hard on their workers in respect of the setting of tasks'. These strikes raised a question mark over the adeptness of the union bureaucracy to orchestrate compromise on the plantations. Tatu estate seems to have been the epicentre of this resurgence, where the management had refused to discuss weeding tasks with the Union. The women's gang came out on June 19th over a weeding job of 180 trees which they had managed to complete the previous day. On June 20th, 'all' the estate's labour force struck in sympathy, though nine factory workers refused to support the action and 'were physically dragged away from the factory by strikers'. Though the Union condemned the strike as 'illegal', they 'were afraid to tell the labour to resume work'. The workers went back on June 24th on a picking task of 2 debbies, after the management and the Union agreed to suspend all weeding 'for the time being'. Even so, though the weeding tasks were reduced to a 180 trees for men and 150 for women, workers came out again on July 4th.

Workers at Oaklands estate followed Tatu into action on June 20th when the men's weeding gang refused to complete a set task of 125 trees. 'All' the factory labour and the women's gang came out in sympathy. There was a return to work on June 22nd after the management gave way and agreed to reduce the task to 100 trees. The conflict reflared on July 1st, when 'all' workers again came out when the women's weeding task was increased to 130 trees. Women workers were once more in the forefront at Ndaraki estate where they came out on June 24th over a weeding job of 140 trees. The men's gang who had been working a task of 210 trees came out in sympathy. After union intervention, workers resumed their original tasks, only to come out again on July 5th in resistance to an increased task of 170 trees for men and 150 for women.

At Mchana estate on June 25th, the men's weeding gang refused a task of 200 trees. It was when this was reduced to 165 trees for men and 70 for the women, that all the estates workforce, including factory labour, struck work on June 25th. There was a return to work after Union officials accepted the women's task, though no conclusion was reached over the men's work. The following day almost everybody came out on strike again. A police presence had 'no effect on the strikers' as 'large numbers' congregated to picket the processing factory which 'was completely successful'. Once again, after Union intervention workers went back on July 6th, 'but a go slow attitude was very definitely adopted again'. At the end of the working day at 1p.m., 'not one man had completed his task', in opposition to the Union's instructions 'who had told them to do the work given'.<sup>56</sup> The

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 20: Coffee Strikes in Thika District, 1963.

<sup>56</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Socfinaf Co. Ltd., report of strike at Mchana estate, Ruiru, July 1963.

strikes were about the intensity of work and the conditions under which tasks were being facilitated. In each case, workers went back after an assurance that the Minister of Labour would visit their estates on July 8th to address their problems.

The employers were especially anxious about these matters given the advent of the omnibus. Babu Kamau believed that the 'loopholes' left by the Verjee Report regarding task setting 'could be the cause' of the strikes. This implied that had tasks been standardised throughout industry by the tribunal, there would have been fewer challenges by workers. At a meeting on July 8th between representatives of the company, the K.C.G.A., the Ministry of Labour and the Union, Kamau alleged that the tasks set by the company were 'exceedingly high' and that workers were not always completing them and, as a result, days were often not marked up on their cards. Underlining that 'inconsistence of task setting was the only major problem', Kamau believed 'that such a major company...was in a position to set and standardise its own tasks' and that once this had been achieved other estates would follow and there would be 'no labour trouble in the area'. The K.C.G.A. Executive Officer, I.R.Price drew attention to the Verjee award which, apart from coffee picking, had upheld the impracticability of standardising tasks, particularly weeding. Price acknowledged that the issues in the dispute between Socfinaf and the Union were widespread since there were 'so many estates affected by the task problem'. Odero Jowi from the Ministry of Labour gave the government's position that while it was possible to set tasks on an estate, it 'is difficult to standardise tasks for the whole country'.

Socfinaf's general manager diminished the causal impact of task setting and alleged that all the recent strikes on Tatu estate 'were politically instigated although he could not prove the fact'. Price blamed the strikes at the estate on 'illegal' political meetings held at the estate by K.A.N.U. Youth Wingers and claimed that the instigators were 'either the Union or Politicians'. He was also sure that 'many' strikes were 'definitely engineered by the Union', as was the 'go-slow system, the organised deliberate measure taken to reduce tasks', which was noticeable on plantations 'right from Nyeri to Kiambu'. Kamau was indignant that his Union 'was totally against strikes'. Questioned about whether the strikes were spontaneous or sponsored by the Union, he 'denied categorically that the Union engineered strikes', and protested his reliability, that he 'personally has helped in stopping strikes in the district'.<sup>57</sup> Though the discussions ended in deadlock, the issue would not go away and continued to be a source of strain between the contending parties.

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<sup>57</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Minutes of a Meeting between Socfinaf and the S.C.P.W.U. officials held at Socfinaf Head Office, 8 July, 1963.

On the eve of the omnibus, the Union also found itself embroiled in a new kind of struggle, emanating from newly licensed African coffee growers. Workers on African farms were generally more exploited, working longer hours and for much less, than on European plantations. They were commonly enrolled as members into African coffee co-operatives<sup>58</sup> along with their employers and urged to adopt restraint to make the co-operative work. The contradictions between planters and labourers existent on the settler estates were reproduced on a large scale amongst Africans themselves. Whilst taking in a wide variety of farmers at various levels of wealth and property ownership, the real power in these co-operatives, to which all African growers were affiliated, belonged to the richest accumulators whose interests in the last analysis they served. The nationalist card was played in order to make these changes in property ownership work.

Overproduction and quota restrictions were driving European planters to the wall through the compulsion to sell larger amounts of their coffee on non-quota markets which brought 'very low returns'.<sup>59</sup> It was here that African producers were able to steal a march by paying lower wages, which were justified by the onset of independence and the need to make sacrifices. Not a few strikes were targeted at African coffee farmers seeking to take advantage of the new circumstances to break with union negotiated pay and conditions brokered on European estates. The Verjee report had to some extent opened the door to this type of conflict since its recommendations were not binding on the 'non-scheduled' coffee growing areas.

The struggle with the Muranga Farmers Co-operative Union and its nine affiliates was fairly typical. They 'were trying to establish that their workers were members of the society'<sup>60</sup> to avoid meeting the conditions of the Verjee award. The Labour Inspector found that labourers wages at the Muranga Co-op ranged from 45/- to 60/- per monthly ticket, whereas those paid by its affiliates ranged from 40/- to 50/-. The co-operative's picking rates ranged from 60/- to 80/- per debe, in many cases well below the Verjee minimum.<sup>61</sup> Kamau was pushed to challenge these conditions making the Union's position clear, that African farmers were not a special case and should not be allowed to evade the terms of the Verjee award which provided for minimum wage rates in the coffee industry 'irrespective of the type and colour of employers'. Nonetheless, union leaders had

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<sup>58</sup> For details of the growth and development of African coffee co-operatives see Appendix 36.

<sup>59</sup> E.A.S. 3 November 1965: 'Coffee labour costs higher than Brazil's'.

<sup>60</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/123: Babu Kamau to Chief Industrial Relations Officer and Minister of Labour, 15 July, 1963.

<sup>61</sup> K.N.A./VK/2/30: Thika L.O. to S.L.O./Central province, 14 August, 1963.

facilitated the ambivalence of the Verjee award which allowed the Muranga Co-operative to make themselves an exception.<sup>62</sup>

Bureaucratic factionalism appeared as inherently contradictory and internecine struggles which abounded at various levels and locations of the plantation unions. The differences between rival factions were amorphous and confused, determined by the opportunism of short term gain combined with the need to break any semblance of accountability, constitutional or otherwise, to the membership. As the bureaucratic apparatus concentrated its power, class pressures were reflected in a distorted manner in a struggle confined to rival factions of the union bureaucracy. Here was the significance of the pseudo irreconcilability which occasionally raised its head, as various cliques attempted to get the members on side as the requirements of factional survival dictated themselves. No differences arising here could surface as a call to mobilise the rank and file, for this would mean to subject the apparatus to the membership and no faction, despite their differences, dare go down this path. This confinement reflected the inherent instability of the union bureaucracy and its fragile dominion over the membership. There was always a danger that rank and file elements would spontaneously emerge and challenge the berths of union officials. The antagonists dare not turn in this direction, instead they competed for support from the state apparatus itself. These weaknesses were a principal source of the schisms and intrigues which rent the enclosed intra-bureaucratic factionalism. All the rival cliques strove for detachment from the rank and file, turning to it only in plebiscitary fashion within a set of rules determined by the Registrar.

Overall, the prevalence of factionalism, which was rife, devastated the S.C.P.W.U. and disintegrated its unity giving pretext to the K.F.L. to impose 'unification' to save the Union from itself. Even with the advent of the K.P.A.W.U., the more concentrated union apparatus was still far from self sufficing. This machine aspired to be strong enough to violate the will of the membership when and where this was able to express itself. At the root of its continued crisis was its inability to make itself unconditionally independent of the membership without substantial assistance from a state machine which was riddled with copious weaknesses of its own.

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<sup>62</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/123: Babu Kamau to Chief Industrial Relations Officer and Minister of Labour, 15 July, 1963.

## Conclusion

### *Compradorism and Revolution*

Unlike the Russian Revolution, the independence struggle in Kenya did not sweep away capitalist exploitation and landlordism. It has been the principal task of this work to investigate some of the reasons why. This has turned not so much on the struggle against colonialism, but on the simultaneous class conflict amongst Africans themselves. In lifting the veil on a few of the more important workers struggles of the period, amongst the thousands that occurred, this work has attempted to unearth a revolutionary undercurrent to the independence struggle, though one that was betrayed. The fruits of this are evident in Kenya today as its related, though unresolved, problems resurface for resolution.

It is a symptom of every revolutionary situation that the classes which rule and those over whom they rule and live off can no longer live side by side. From the closing months of 1959, marked by the East African Railway Strike, the organised labour movement was determined to have its say and began to act independently as a mass in recurrent strike waves until 1964-5 when inertia began to take its toll. This was one of the principal reasons for Britain's withdrawal from Kenya and it is why those to whom they transferred state power have been uncomfortable ever since. The indigenous bourgeoisie whilst exhibiting strong accumulative tendencies<sup>1</sup> was hardly able to accrue the vast surpluses necessary for industrialisation and modernisation. Along with their subordinates, they were comprador to the core and entirely dependent on foreign capital<sup>2</sup> for their survival. This weakness meant they were incapable of completing a democratic revolution to realise the principles of national self determination. A developed bourgeois democracy was therefore remote and unattainable for reasons related to the late arrival of capitalism during a phase where it could no longer generate the surpluses required to afford class compromise. The antagonism between organised labour and the African bourgeoisie had gone too far and deep to enable the latter to assume the role of national leadership without a heavy reliance on the former colonial power and dependence on it thereafter. The assistance of the K.F.L. was decisive in lifting the compradorists into power, who then turned on the trade unions and used this authority to fit a straitjacket.

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<sup>1</sup> G.Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya* [New Haven, 1982].

<sup>2</sup> Nicola Swainson, *The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya 1918-77* [London, 1980].



This course was by no means inevitable. The strike movements on the plantations and elsewhere were central to the course of the independence struggle. Their changing contours did not merely track its path but to an extent, still in process of measure, determined its course. Organised labour became more assertive and developed a distinct class identity as it threatened to pull the trajectory of independence its way and out of the court of the national bourgeoisie. Only the betrayals of trade union leadership prevented this movement from revealing its full and true potential.

### *The Contradictions of Trade Unionism*

After January-May 1960, it became clear all but to the most myopic observers that a 'movement' was indeed developing in the key coffee producing areas. For the Labour Department, its most worrisome feature lay in its potential to engulf entire districts. The containment strategies of labour officers were tested to the limits and proved largely ineffective, hence their increasing reliance on union officials to perform their erstwhile roles. In a fragile period of transition, this was the most alarming development of all for those concerned with transmutation. The pervasive aim of the colonial government in Kenya and elsewhere had been 'indirect rule' by administering Africans through the instrument of what passed as their indigenous institutions. Colonial corporatism was indirect rule at its most subtle and sophisticated with the trade unions designated as instruments of African workers themselves, though in reality straddled by a bureaucratic stratum of officials attached to the state itself. Like the tribal chiefs before them, union leaders were widely exposed as a layer of collaborationists. Previous forms of rule were breaking down.

The Labour Department invested its energies into cultivating a compliant plantation unionism with leaders dependent upon it for guidance and counselling, a policy that had achieved some success in other industries during the Emergency. However, the comparatively late arrival of the plantation unions meant that they could be like no other unions in Kenya which had been able to evolve their relationships with the employers over a number of years. By contrast the C.P.W.U. and its successors had been called into existence during a period of severe crisis for Kenya's coffee planters. This acted as a forcing house for plantation workers who were ever so impatient for gains and redress to a whole range of unpostponable grievances and problems. This left both sides with little room for manoeuvre under conditions where negotiating structures were largely unrooted.

From its inception, the C.P.W.U. embraced the Labour Department which worked to nurture its officials. It was envisaged that the problems of controlling anonymous rural masses would to a large extent be overcome by the advent of a bureaucratically run union. Workers would take the bait of this form and enter an organisation saddled by officials with symbiotic ties to the Labour Department, and effectively working on its behalf. In this way the state attempted to reduce the threat that the anonymity of the plantation workforce posed, by giving it an identity, though one which was at odds with the identity that it was forging for itself. The department's aim was to use the C.P.W.U. as a vehicle for defusing strike actions, an agenda which collapsed when workers embraced the Union and filled it with a content of struggle. Its greatest concerns then focused on wildcat strikes beyond the control of union officials. At this point, conciliation in its various guises foundered and for a while were largely unable to function. The union bureaucracy, like the labour laws that defined its role, needed a firm certainty of rules in order to judge and prohibit the unpredictable behaviours of the membership. This was undermined by the pulsating doubt of change and transformation thrown up by spontaneous strikes.

Apart from its imposition and conscious cultivation on the part of the state, the labour bureaucracy generally had its roots in the depths of a backward society. Widespread illiteracy lent itself to the proliferation of such a stratum which could then substitute itself for the self activity of plantation workers on the grounds that its cadres were an educated layer of representatives who were there to work on behalf of their members. At its most fundamental level, this involved administering conflict and keeping it within the bounds of a prescribed order. The weight of the bureaucratic environment was inherently corrupting, with its officers mostly detached from, and largely unaccountable to, the union membership. The class ties of those workers drawn into this stratum were inevitably loosened. They became inculcated with narrow vision and political minimalism as they accustomed themselves to think and decide for a supposedly passive and voiceless membership. Hence the relatively privileged positions of workers drawn into this apparatus, were founded upon representation in opposition to mobilisation.

For union officials generally, the trade unions were instruments of their estranged apparatus, though workers repeatedly sought to turn it their way. Their official ideal of trade unionism, emanated from a top down bureaucracy to which the members were subordinate. They believed that their activities as brokers was trade union activity. For those imbued with bureaucratic unionism, this practice was primary and above strike action. So that once issues had been raised in strike action, it was then time to 'wind down' and begin negotiations. Here was a layer of functionaries who as a

result of their work, came into more regular contact with employers and labour officers than with their own members. As a result of the rarefied atmosphere in which these relationships were conducted, the Labour Department and the employers had far more influence over them than meetings with workers themselves. Striking disparities in living standards between union officials and the membership were also evident. The labour bureaucracy was essentially petty bourgeois in terms of its way of life and approximation to the standards, ideology and functions of the middle class. Hence we can begin to understand the frustrations of plantation workers with their power mediated through such a partition wall.

Nonetheless, union bureaucrats and agitators alike were united by their defencist concerns at a time when the movement itself was going headlong onto the offensive showing a struggle which often left the demands of the individual strike well behind. The limitations of trade union consciousness, dominated by the immediacy of workplace struggles, meant that even the most militant agitators and 'Mau Mau' amongst the rank and file were unable to understand the phenomenon of labour bureaucracy or mount any sustained challenge to it. Both syndicalists and bureaucrats were united in conception, if not by allegiance, that the minimum programme of what seemed attainable given the continued sway of the colonial state and its Africanised successor was the necessary benchmark to be adjusted to. The recommendation of union leaders that a truncated independence which allotted the elephantine hams to the embryonic bourgeoisie was the best of all possible worlds followed from this narrow minimalism. Given this outlook, disputes were treated as purely wages struggles which could only reconstitute previous relationships on new terms. Furthermore, this served to ensure that plantation struggles were waged in isolation from the main political issues of the day. Both tendencies attempted to deal with the mass movement beneath them by turning the real relationship between workplace struggles and national liberation on its head. The 'Uhuru bonus' was a vulgar attempt to direct the arousal of class political awareness, which infused the developing national consciousness amongst workers, into sectional struggles for wages. However, as this thesis has sought to show, in view of the profound and deep malaise within Kenya's economy, the plantation strikes were less able than at any previous time of becoming vehicles of partial gain. With both tendencies sharing the same outlook, the labour bureaucracy was able to recover itself sufficiently to ward off potential contenders since the latter were unable to advance any real alternative.

Despite the rapid capitulation of their leaders, workers had been generally reticent to discard their union. Instead there was a marked preparedness by many to withhold their subscriptions as a protest at the 'class collaboration' of their leaders, thus endangering the foundations of the union

bureaucracy. Whilst we should not underestimate the confusion created amongst workers entering the unions for the first time by the zig-zags and about turns of their leadership, though this contained the potential for becoming a prelude to greater clarity as they began to advance demands of their own. A sharp and intimate relationship between the minimum and the maximum programme was developing in the consciousness of many workers, who were on the threshold of going beyond the sectionalism of trade union consciousness to approach a political awareness that transcended the limitations of bourgeois nationalism. This showed a characteristic blend of syndicalism and revolutionary nationalism in an outlook which celebrated the spontaneity of direct action. Hence the concern of the state and the employers to reinforce 'industrial unionism' when workers showed signs of moving beyond this. This interconnectedness between trade union struggles for apparently sectional demands and the national question gave rise to extreme nervousness and unease within the labour bureaucracy, unleashing internecine power struggles within its ranks. This seemed to reflect a crisis of leadership within the unions revolving around how far the struggle for independence should go and who should be its main beneficiaries. These developments made the roosts of trade union officials untenable, until finally only a former trade union leader at the behest of the state could risk intervention to fit the legal straitjacket that attempted to give some security to this stratum. So that whilst workers gathered more confidence, they were led by a leadership that was wedded to the transfer of power to the national bourgeoisie and were prepared to use the Africanised colonial state apparatus to attack their own constituency.

### *The Unstable Foundations of Corporatism*

These anxieties were brought to a head by Mboya's entry as Minister of Labour into the K.A.D.U./K.A.N.U. coalition [1962] amidst a general strike in industry and on the plantations. This symbolised a trade union leadership hitching its fortunes to a government whose aims fell far short of addressing even the minimum expectations of organised labour. As in the past, Mboya's manoeuvres seem to have been calculated to defuse and redirect the external movement back into the state apparatus itself. Although this occasioned a deep split within the labour bureaucracy, most of its leading figures were themselves bent on this course. Behind the multiple rivalries lay a widespread concern, emanating from the rank and file, that trade union independence was being sacrificed at the altar of the coalition. What needs to be stressed is that what alarmed the layer of officials around Peter Kibisu, the K.F.L.'s acting general secretary, was not what Mboya was doing, but how he was doing it and the extent to which this compromised the bureaucracy as a whole in the eyes of its expectant membership. Events in Tanganyika, where the new African government was preparing to

absorb the Tanganyikan Federation of Labour into the state, reinforced suspicions that there would be moves to 'nationalise' the K.F.L. Though this seems to have led to a widespread discussion about the need for a labour party to protect union autonomy, it did not get beyond verbal formulas. This may be attributable to the realisation that the formation of such a party whilst promising some safeguards for trade union independence, would give a political focus to the irrepressible strike movement.

Mboya was just able to ride this storm, by playing off the factions around Kibisu and those attached to Kubai and Ochwada in the breakaway Kenya Trade Union Congress. His plans to retain, though to reshape, colonial corporatism could then be laid. This was initiated by the Industrial Relations Charter which, according to Clayton and Savage, was 'a restatement of the Fabian views of Mboya, a development of the traditional position of the Labour Department and a codification of existing practice'.<sup>3</sup> During 1963 there was almost continuous state intervention into trades disputes and the provisions of the Trade Disputes [Arbitration and Inquiry] Act were invoked on 123 occasions.<sup>4</sup> This was an indication of structures under stress and the inability to inflict a major defeat on the organised labour movement from which it would take years to recover. This was the only basis upon which corporatism could secure its roots. The state sought to repair itself by concentrating its power through the Tripartite Agreement [1964], where the K.F.L. acceded to a twelve month wage standstill and a total ban on strikes in return for measures by the government and the employers to alleviate unemployment through increasing the size of their work forces. The government agreed to increase its number of workers by 15% and the employers by 10%, though there were countless instances of them side stepping and ignoring the agreement.

This was reinforced by the Trade Disputes Act [1964] which superseded previous legislation<sup>5</sup> and established the Industrial Court, which was kept continuously busy thereafter. Despite this straitjacketing, there was a sharp rise in the number of man days lost to industrial disputes.<sup>6</sup> This was mainly attributable to five national strikes organised by some of the country's most powerful unions: the Railway African Union, the K.D.C.W.U., the Kenya National Union of Teachers and the Union of Posts and Telecommunications Employees.<sup>7</sup> There was evidence of this stubbornness on the plantations too as the K.P.A.W.U. accepted an Industrial Court award of shs.100/50 for the thirty

<sup>3</sup> A. Clayton and D.C.Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya*, p.444.

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/106:L.D.A.R. 1963.

<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/67/Trade Disputes Act, 1963; Ministerial orders for the 'check-off' system, 1965-6.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 23 for details.

<sup>7</sup> P.R.O./ CO/544/110:L.D.A.R.1965.

day ticket in December 1965 but was unable to accede to the large scale redundancies implied by the award. This showed a union bureaucracy that, despite its willingness, was by no means secure and able to operate unconditionally. These all reflected an undefeated labour movement with its own power concentrated in fewer and larger unions. This confirmed long standing fears that amalgamation under conditions where a punishing defeat had yet to be inflicted, contained the potential to enhance union power and loosen the state's grip over the labour movement.

The government's reflex was to issue a statement of intent, Sessional Paper No.10 'African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya'[1965], in an attempt to tighten its rein. This emphasised the 'first responsibility' of the unions to develop 'a disciplined, skilled and responsible labour force for hard productive work'. Commenting on the incidence of strikes and wage claims, the paper stressed the need for compulsory arbitration of 'major issues' and urged 'special legislation' in 'sensitive' industries to avoid economic paralysis. Referring to the split in the labour movement it called for one central organisation whose aim would be to 'protect the workers and advance the interests of the nation as a whole'.<sup>8</sup> This heralded yet another Trades Disputes Act [1965], which required all reported disputes to be referred in the first instance to a tripartite committee, consisting of representatives from the government, the F.K.E. and the K.F.L.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, the Minister for Labour was empowered to impose compulsory conciliation and arbitration, refer disputes to the Industrial Court and to make strikes illegal.<sup>10</sup> It also extended the schedule of essential services where strikes were unlawful under any circumstances, introduced the 'check off' system<sup>11</sup> and outlawed sympathy strikes. These powers were extended by further legislation in 1971 which provided for a more or less permanent freeze on wages.<sup>12</sup>

The climax of factionalism was reached during the course of 1965 as the K.F.L. expelled the dockers and oil workers unions from its ranks, and an alternative trade union centre emerged as the Kenya African Workers Congress [K.A.W.C.]. Other unions broke from the K.F.L. to affiliate to

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<sup>8</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/111/Kenya Sessional Papers [1963-5]: Sessional Paper No.10, 'African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya'.

<sup>9</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/110:L.D.A.R.1965.

<sup>10</sup> Wage controls and strike bans were finally formulated into law in the Trades Disputes Act of 1971. This provided for a more or less permanent freeze on wages and instituted a convoluted process by which workers could resort to strike action.

<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/67/Trade Disputes Act, 1963; Minister orders for the 'check-off' system, 1965-6; K.N.A./ABK/8/69/C.O.T.U., check off orders 1966-7.

<sup>12</sup> P. Anyang' Nyong'o, 'The Possibilities and Historical Limitations of Import-Substitution Industrialization in Kenya', P. Coughlin and G.K. Ikiara [eds.] *Industrialization in Kenya: In Search of a Strategy* [Nairobi, 1988], p.27.

the K.A.W.C., including the Common Services Union, the railwaymen, the building and construction union, the quarry and mineworkers, and the Salaried Workers Association. The K.A.W.C. soon gathered widespread support even amongst unions affiliated to the K.F.L.<sup>13</sup> These were symptoms of an organisation on the verge of collapse. These developments reflected the frustration felt by some sections of workers over the wages standstill resulting from the Tripartite Agreement, and political differences between the K.F.L.'s corporatism and the K.A.W.C.'s desire for a more autonomous labour movement.<sup>14</sup> The K.A.W.C. opposed the K.F.L.'s assent to the agreement as being 'soft with the employers'<sup>15</sup>, a stance which encouraged some of its affiliates to break the agreement, an example followed by some K.F.L. unions. By the end of 1964, the K.A.W.C. had gained so much ground from the K.F.L. that it was able to win registration.

This rivalry reached its peak in August when a fight broke out at a meeting of the K.D.C.W.U. in Mombasa resulting in the death of three trade unionists and leaving over a hundred others injured. The K.F.L. had been pressing the K.D.C.W.U. to take the road of amalgamation at the time. Following the Mombasa incident, which had the hallmarks of a state provocation, Kenyatta appointed a presidential inquiry into the trade union movement. Referring to the events in Mombasa, he explained the briefing of the committee to 'put an end to the situation in which such terrible things may occur. It is therefore sad that the labour scene should have been so disturbed because of differences among trade union leaders. Kenya must have industrial peace'. This was how the state had orchestrated things to appear, to give itself the opportunity to concentrate and centralise its power to the highest degree in opposition to the organised working class. Differences within and between unions had now turned to violent confrontations and that it was the state's duty to intervene to protect the unions from themselves, or so things were presented. Thereafter the Uhuru state assumed the posture of the guardian of workers interests.

The committee recommended the 'immediate de-registration'<sup>16</sup> of the K.F.L. and the K.A.W.C. and their replacement with the Central Organisation of Trade Unions [C.O.T.U.]<sup>17</sup> 'to which all trade unions had to be affiliated'. This would begin with fresh elections for all trade unions 'from the branch level upwards'<sup>18</sup>, to be carried out under government supervision.<sup>19</sup> Provision was made for

<sup>13</sup> Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* [Nairobi, 1995], p.306.

<sup>14</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/108:L.D.A.R. 1964.

<sup>15</sup> Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* [Nairobi, 1995], p.306.

<sup>16</sup> P.R.O./ CO/544/110:L.D.A.R.1965.

<sup>17</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/70/ C.O.T.U., 1965-7.

<sup>18</sup> P.R.O./ CO/544/110:L.D.A.R.1965.

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./ABK/8/71/Trade Union elections, 1965.

the President to appoint the Secretary General of C.O.T.U. and for its central council to include a government representative, heralding close and intimate ties between the state and the union confederation. The committee further urged that C.O.T.U. continue with the amalgamation<sup>20</sup> of trade unions 'as one of its urgent and primary objectives',<sup>21</sup> in order 'to have fewer but strong and viable trade unions'. The check-off system was also made compulsory with incoming subscriptions divided up between C.O.T.U., the union affiliate and an investment fund approved by the Government. The Government reserved the right to withhold check-off payments to C.O.T.U. designated for its affiliates, as a disciplinary device. This system of mandatory deductions at source, carried out by the employers before workers received their wages, effectively secured the berths of the trade union bureaucracy and guaranteed financial nourishment to this apparatus under the protective wing of the state.<sup>22</sup>

Between 1965-70, the relative autonomy of the state all but diminished in the metamorphosis to overtly corporatist forms of rule which, in tandem with an unstable bonapartist<sup>23</sup> regime, strove to suspend the conflict of classes whilst upholding the dominion of foreign investors and corporations. It appeared not so much to dissolve class antagonisms as to keep them apart. In essence, the tripartism of post colonial Kenya was a manufactured fiction of equal partnership crowned by an 'impartial' court of arbitration, the Industrial Court, whose objective was to forestall all labour conflicts through the device of compulsory arbitration. Nonetheless, though trade union autonomy was severely constrained, it was far from emasculated as has been suggested.<sup>24</sup> One of the defining features of corporatism was to hold the labour movement in a state of enforced disunity<sup>25</sup>, though it was mostly unable to do this in Kenya. What was erected was a regime which whilst draping itself in the intimidating garb of corporatism was far from being able to uproot independent trade unionism. Though state provocation in Mombasa gave the pretext for more repressive labour laws, their impact

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<sup>20</sup> A further omnibus emerged during the course of 1965, the Kenya Union of Commercial, Food and Allied Workers which was formed by the amalgamation of the K.D.C.W.U., the Brewing and Bottling Workers Union, the Kenya Dyers, Cleaners and Laundry Workers Union, and the Tobacco Workers Union.

<sup>21</sup> P.R.O./ CO/544/110:L.D.A.R.1965.

<sup>22</sup> P.R.O./ CO/544/110:L.D.A.R.1965.

<sup>23</sup> C.Ley, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism*. [California, 1975], pp.207-9; K.Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *Marx-Engels Selected Works in One Volume* [London, 1973], pp.96-179.

<sup>24</sup> Rok Ajulu, *Capital, the State and the Working Class in Kenya: Emasculation and Control of the Labour Movement, 1937-69*, Ph.D. University of Sussex 1989.

<sup>25</sup> All the corporate states of the inter-war years were founded upon the physical annihilation of independent trade unions. The Labour Front in Germany, the Charter of Labour in Italy, the syndicates of Francoist Spain and Salazar's Portugal, and Vichy France's *Chartre du Travail*, all established official syndicates to replace free trade unions which were smashed up. Despite the periodic imprisonment of trade unionists in Kenya there was no comparable process of violent integration.



was hardly able to demolish the defensive bulwarks of organised labour. This state was inherently unstable since even while the hands of the labour movement were tied it was far from defeated as figures and statistics for strikes and disputes for the entire subsequent period show<sup>26</sup>. Strikes continued to do irreparable damage<sup>27</sup> to the trappings of fictitious consensus making the post independence regime one of inherent and recurrent instability.

### *Results and Prospects*

This study of trade unionism on the plantations, has disclosed the role of the labour bureaucracy as an essential component of an historic betrayal. It was ultimately the most important instrument through which a temporary, though unstable, equilibrium in relations between the classes was achieved on the basis of the African bourgeoisie's dominance. This period was replete with unmanageable conflicts with strike waves spiralling out of control and into the depths of the plantation districts. Overall this energy was dissipated by a leadership that feared the groundswell beneath it and was in any case working for the other side. Unable and unwilling to challenge the state, union leaders were inclined to bring it over to their side though the reverse almost always occurred as they were drawn into more intimate relationship with the apparatus of which they were essentially, though unofficially, a part.

What plantation union leaders strained to avoid at all costs, and here was their priceless value to the Labour Department, was the mobilisation of their members in conjunction with other trade unionists to bring forward the withdrawal of the colonial power and institute a post-colonial regime dominated by organised labour. Of course this was a task which the unions, no matter how powerful, could not perform alone without revolutionary leadership guiding the movement to take control of production and to expropriate foreign, mostly British, companies.<sup>28</sup> There are of course an army of incurable sceptics who would always and under any circumstances relegate such a prospect as a lost cause. As to historical science, as the deeper molecular processes at work beneath the surface are analysed, and the currents that moved the tides are more appreciated, so the concreteness of such a scenario becomes more visible.

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix 1: Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1951-74.

<sup>27</sup> M.Chege, 'The State and Labour : Industrial Relations in Independent Kenya', P.Coughlin and G.K.Ikiara [eds.] *Industrialization in Kenya : In Search of a Strategy* [Nairobi, 1988], p.183.

<sup>28</sup> It cannot be emphasised too much that the 'Uhuru' transmutation involved fundamental changes not in property relations, but in property ownership. The 'Uhuru' state served to guard over the limitations of this change and to ensure that the former did not override the latter.

Overall, the coalescence of national and class struggles was unmistakable. Trade union struggles came to the fore, challenging the husks of bourgeois nationalism and creating rare opportunities for an interrogation of its vague formulas. An unresolved crisis of leadership within the ranks of organised labour meant that these were not seized. Trade union independence was conflated with national independence of the bourgeois variety which inherited and 'Africanised' the intact colonial state apparatus. Advances in consciousness were arrested at this level and its requisite confusions perpetuated. There was a great deal of unfinished business.

This work has sought to show that the organised working class was fighting its own independence struggle. The trade unions were at its core surrounded by real and potential allies amongst unorganised workers, poorer farmers and the oppressed generally. The question of social ownership was germinating, though this remained for the most part clouded by 'Africanisation'. Despite all disclaimers of 'outlandishness', its trajectory was essentially revolutionary and the opportunities that were sent up during the course of its development must lead us to revisit the sites of betrayal. The research undertaken here has raised more questions than it has answered and has only marked a point of departure for the collective work to come on Kenya's labour history during this and subsequent periods.

## *Appendices*

### *Appendix I*

#### *Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes, 1951-74*

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Stoppages</i>	<i>No. of Workers involved.</i>	<i>No. of Man-Days lost</i>
.1951.	57	6,610	10,708
.1952.	84	5,957	5,718
.1953.	39	3,221	2,674
.1954.	33	1,518	2,026
.1955.	35	17,852	81,870
.1956.	38	5,173	28,230
.1957.	67	21,809	23,657
.1958.	96	21,395	59,096
.1959.	67	42,214	431,973
.1960.	232	72, 545	757,860
.1961.	167	26,677	120,454
<b>.1962.</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>132,433</b>	<b>745, 799</b>
.1963.	230	54,576	235,349
.1964.	221	67,155	167,767
.1965.	200	105,602	345,855
.1966.	155	39,123	114,254
.1967.	138	29,985	109,128
.1968.	93	20,508	47,979
.1969.	124	37,641	87,516
.1970.	84	18,945	60,761
.1971.	72	17,300	162,108
.1972.	110	26,000	141,000
.1973.	72	15,834	449,053
.1974.	132	23,157	101,241

[i] 1951-65 figures compiled from Labour Department Annual Reports throughout the period.

[ii] 1966-74 Ministry of Labour statistics cited in R.Kombo, 'The Role of Unions and Employers' Organisations in Economic Development and Promotion in Kenya', East African Research Symposium, Zambia, January 1976, p.47.

## Appendix 2

### Guide to Causation

<b>A: Wages</b>	<b>B: Rations</b>	<b>C: Conditions</b>
1. Wage increase	1. Demand for rations	1. Poor housing & living conditions
2. Wage cuts	2. Reduced rations	2. Demand for housing
3. Arrears	3. Demand for increased rations	3. Housing allowance
4. Bonuses	4. Ration composition	4. Medical facilities
5. Sick pay	5. Sick rations	5. Cultivation rights
6. Cash in lieu of rations		6. Compensation for loss of crops
		7. Terms and conditions of service
		8. Africanisation

<b>D: Tickets</b>	<b>E: Tasks</b>	<b>F: Time</b>	<b>G: Discipline</b>
1. Change from ticket to monthly payment	1. Allegations of poor /insufficient work	1. Excessive hours /reduction in hours	1. Demand for removal of headman / nyapara
2. Unmarked ticket	2. Excessive work /reduction in tasks	2. Punctuality	2. Harsh / abusive supervision
		3. Absenteeism	3. Dismissal/ reinstatement

<b>H: Union</b>	<b>I: Other</b>	<b>J: Action</b>
1. Recognition and access	1. Redundancies	1. Sympathy stoppage
2. Refusal to state grievances in absence of union official	2. Police raid on labour lines	2. General strike
3. Victimisation for union activity	3. Refusal to state grievances	3. Joint coffee and sisal strike
4. Dismissal for political agitation	4. Refusal to RTW as a precondition of negotiations	4. Go-Slow
		5. Lock-Out

## Appendix 3

## Strikes and Trade Disputes in Thika, Kiambu, 1947-59

Year	Location	Coffee	Sisal	Other	Total	Causes of Coffee Strikes
.1947. <sup>1</sup>	Thika	4	2			A1,E2,B1,G2.
				Air Ministry Works Dept /1		
				Farm /1		
				Posho Mill /1	9	
.1948. <sup>2</sup>	Thika	3	2			E2,A1,G2
				Building Contractor /1	6	
	Kiambu	1	1			E2.
				Quarry /1		
				Farm /1		
				Earthworks /1		
				Laundry Servants /1	6	
.1949. <sup>3</sup>	Thika	2	0			E1, B2, G2, E2, A2 .
				Kenya Tanning Extract Co /1		
				P.W.D. /1	4	
	Kiambu	2				E2, G2, B3.
				E.A.R.H. Earthmovers /2		
				Building /1		
				Brewing /1	6	
.1950. <sup>4</sup>	Thika	3	0			A1, A3.
				Kenya Cannery Ltd /1		
				E.A.P.L. /1	5	
	Kiambu			Bore Hole Contractors /1		
				Engineering /1	2	
.1951. <sup>5</sup>	Thika			Sugar Estate /1		
				Kenya Cannery Ltd /1	2	
	Kiambu	1				E1.
				Farm /1		
				E.A.Veterinary Res. Org. /1	3	
.1952. <sup>6</sup>	Thika	2	0			E2, G2, B2, A6, A1.
				Building /1		
				Kenya Cannery Ltd /1		
				Farm /2		
				E.A.P.L. /1	7	

<sup>1</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/191/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1946 - 7;  
K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/189/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1947-9.

<sup>2</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/189/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1947-9;  
K.N.A./ PQ/10/4/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1948-52.

<sup>3</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/189/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1947-9;  
K.N.A./ PQ/10/4/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1948-52;  
K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/208/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, October 1949 - December 1950.

<sup>4</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/208/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, October 1949 - December 1950;  
K.N.A./ PQ/10/4/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1948-52.

<sup>5</sup> K.N.A./ PQ/10/4/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1948-52;  
K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/209/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1951 - 2.

<sup>6</sup> K.N.A./ PQ/10/4/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1948-52;  
K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/209/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1951 - 2.

	Kiambu	1				E1.
				Other /1	2	
.1953. <sup>7</sup>	Thika	1	0		1	A2.
	Kiambu			Engineering /1	1	
.1954. <sup>8</sup>	Thika			Tailoring /1	1	
.1955. <sup>9</sup>	Thika	1				E2.
				E.A. Bag & Cordage /1	2	
	Kiambu	2			2	G2,A1.
.1956. <sup>10</sup>	Thika			E.A.Tanning & Extract Co./1	1	
	Kiambu	6				E2, A1, A4, G2.
				Nairobi Wattle Co./2	8	
.1957. <sup>11</sup>	Thika	3	0			D2, E1, G3.
				Ranch /1	4	
.1958. <sup>12</sup>	Thika	3	0			B2,E2,D2,I2,A1,G2, C1,G2,G3, A1,B1.
				K.E.M.E. /1	4	
	Kiambu			Bata Shoe /1	1	
.1959. <sup>13</sup>	Thika	11	0			D1.
				Quarries /2		
				Sawmilling /3	16	
	Kiambu			Nairobi Wattle Co./1	1	
<b>Totals</b>		46	5		92	

#### Appendix 4

*Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya during, 1959* <sup>14</sup>

<i>Industrial Group</i>	<i>Number of Stoppages</i>	<i>Number of Workers Involved</i>	<i>Number of Man-days Lost</i>
Agriculture	19	6,323	13, 042
Mining and Quarrying	5	2,232	71, 445
Manufacturing	16	3,078	16,727
Transport	3	857	7,112
Docks	2	5,002	5,787
Miscellaneous	16	956	1,110
Public Services	6	23,766	316, 750
<b>Total</b>	67	42,214	431, 973

<sup>7</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/210/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1953.

<sup>8</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/211/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1954.

<sup>9</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/212/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports 1955.

<sup>10</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/213/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1956.

<sup>11</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/214/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1957.

<sup>12</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/203/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1958.

<sup>13</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/207/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1959.

<sup>14</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/96: L.D.A.R. 1959.

## Appendix 5

*Coffee Strikes in Thika District, 1959*<sup>15</sup>

\*Special Note: The tables that follow have included estates and workplaces where strikes are known to have taken place, but where no official strike report [L.D.98] was filed. These disputes are indicated by the estate or workplace accompanied by - in various columns to indicate the missing data. Information on these strikes has been extracted from incidental references in various official and unofficial correspondence.

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Estate / Division</i>	<i>Number, type and gender of workers involved</i>	<i>Man Hours Lost</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Causes [prioritised]</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
5.6	Kiboko, Donyo Sabuk	200 female labourers [Kamba]	1,000	-	C6	Chief's intervention. Workers had cultivated land 'illegally'. Further cropping only on allocated land.
30.12	Swahara, Thika	107 labourers	107	CPWU	A4, G3, H3	LO intervention. Reinstatement.
-	Tatu [Socfinaf], Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Matunguru [Socfinaf], Mitubiri	-	-	-	-	-
-	Oaklands [Socfinaf], Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Ngewe [Socfinaf], Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Mchana [Socfinaf], Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Sisal Ltd. [Coffee Division], Makuyu	-	-	-	-	-
-	Samuru, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	Donyo Sabuk [1958]	-	-	-	-	-
-	Kia Ora [Criticos], Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals:</b>	11	307	1,107	-	-	-

<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location</i>									
Donyo Sabuk	2	Thika	2	Ruiru	5	Makuyu	1	Mitubiri	1

<sup>15</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/207/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1959.

## Appendix 6

Disputes in Other Industries, Thika 1959 <sup>16</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
7.4	Donyo Sabuk '58 [sisal & coffee]	180 sisal cutters	450	-	New owners intro monthly payment. Strikers wanted to stay with ticket system.	Reasons for change explained. RTW. LO said strike was a 'try on'.
29.8 - 5.9	V.D. Stone Quarries, Thika	168 quarry workers	5,880	EAFBCW	A1	Workers [apart from clerks and stone dressers] got 15%. Clerks=5/-pm; stone dressers= increased 1/50 on peice work rates.
5-19.10	J.A.Bekker's Stone Quarry, Thika	48 quarry workers	2,880	EAFBCW	A1, G3	Union's demands conceded
12-19.10	L.Meghji Kanji Sawmill, Thika	38 sawmill and joinery workers	1,824	KTFWU	C7	KFL intervened. RTW pending negs
12-19.10	Mistry Lalji Valji Sawmill, Thika	8 sawmill and joinery workers	160	KTFWU	C7	As above
20.10.	Mistry Shamji Arjan & Sons Sawmill, Thika	20 woodworkers	100	KTFWU	Jl as above	That their employers would join negs being held for other sawmills.
-	EA Bag & Cordage, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	Kenya Cannery, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	Metal Box, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	Bulley's Tanneries, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	K.E.M.E., Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	United Textile Industries, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	Nath Brothers, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
-	Kakuzi Fibrelands [sisal], Mitubiri	-	-	-	-	-
-	Sisal Ltd., Makuyu	-	-	-	-	-
-	Anglo French Sisal Co.	-	-	-	-	-
-	Munyu estate [sisal]	-	-	-	-	-
-	Samar estate [sisal], Makuyu	-	-	-	-	-
-	Ngoliba estate [sisal], Mitubiri	-	-	-	-	-

<sup>16</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/207/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1959.



-	Mananja estate [sisal], Makuyu	-	-	-	-	-
-	Nimak estate [pineapples]	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	21	462	11,294	-	-	-

<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/Location</i>									
Donyo Sabuk	1	Thika	12	Makuyu	3	Mitubiri	2	Other*	3

\* L.D. 98 Strike reports give no details of the wards where these employers were located. These disputes are indicated in this column throughout the appendices.

### *Appendix 7*

#### *Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1960<sup>17</sup>*

<i>Industrial Group</i>	<i>Number of Stoppages</i>	<i>Number of Workers Involved</i>	<i>Number of Man-Days Lost</i>
Agriculture	122	57,075	637,933
Mining and Quarrying	11	1,050	9,285
Building and Construction	41	4,358	52,001
Manufacturing	40	8,927	56,675
Kenya Government Public Services, High Commission Services, and Local Authorities	5	214	1,054
Miscellaneous	13	921	912
<b>Total</b>	232	72,545	757,860

<sup>17</sup> PRO/CO/544/98: Labour Department Annual Report, 1960.

## Appendix 8

Coffee Strikes in Thika, 1960 -1<sup>18</sup>

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Estate /Division</i>	<i>Number, type and gender of workers involved</i>	<i>Man Hours Lost</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Causes [prioritised]</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
.1960.						
2-15.1	Shortlands, Thika	49 men & 36 women	6,552	CPWU	G1, A4, B1	No settlement. Workers sacked. Refused to vacate housing. Report of dispute accepted by LC under TD[A&I]Ord.
5-25.1	Samuru, Thika	427 men and women	32,025	CPWU	H1,H2	Union/KFL secured RTW with issues left unresolved
22.1	Bendor, Thika	75 men & 150 women	300	CPWU	H2	RTW as precondition for further meeting to discuss grievances
27.1	Rubislaw, Thika	70 men and women	560	CPWU	G1, B1	Headman asked for his own discharge
1-13.2	Mongalia, Mitubiri	110 workers	8,740	CPWU	G1, E2, F1	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved
2.3	Chania Bridge, Thika	5 women	Lock-out	CPWU	C3, C9	Workers remained sacked.
14-15.3	Karakutu, Thika	100 women casuals	1,000	-	E2, B1	RTW with issues unresolved.
16.3	Masega, Ruiru	55 workers	55	-	A4, B3	RTW with issues unresolved.
17.3	Hatwara, Thika	70 labourers	490	-	G3	RTW with issues unresolved
21-8.3	Twiga, Ruiru	150 labourers	6,300	CPWU	E2, G3	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved
29.3 to 2.4	Munyara, Thika	60 labourers	1,800	CPWU	G1, G3, A4	Strikers took discharge rather than work with headman
1-13.4	Kitimai, Thika	110 workers	10,010	CPWU	J1, C3, C6	Strikers refused Union RTW instruction, took discharge rather than work with headman
4-20.4	Kiaora, Ruiru	650 coffee & sisal workers	68,200	CPWU	A1, B3, A4, G1, C2	Union RTW instruction with issues left unresolved
4.4.-6.5	Bendor, Thika	200 workers	25,200	CPWU	G3	Union RTW instruction with issues left unresolved
5-7.4	Sisal Ltd. [Coffee Div.], Makuyu	300 labourers	6,300	CPWU	J1, A1	Union instructed RTW as precondition for airing grievances
6-12.4	Brook, Ruiru	89 workers	3,738	CPWU	G1	Refused RTW advice
6-16.4	Matuu, Donyo Sabuk	200 mostly resident labourers	12,000	CPWU	A1: from 30 to 75/- per ticket	2/- offer. Union instruction for RTW.
7-14.4	Monyu, Makuyu	100 workers	4,200	CPWU	A1& to be issued with jembes for weeding	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved
7.4-5.5	Punda Milia [s], Makuyu	110 workers	18,480		J1, A1	RTW as 30 resident labourers evicted.
8-9.4	Ndarugu [s] Ruiru	180 workers	2,520	CPWU	J1, A1, G3	Brought in new CBK wage scale. RTW. 39 refused to go back.

<sup>18</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/205/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1960; ABK/ 8/206/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1961.

8-14.4	Glenlee, Ruiru	97 workers	4,656	CPWU	G1, A1	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved and 10 workers sacked.
11-29.4	Sisal Ltd. Coffee Div., Makuyu	300 workers	35,700	CPWU	J1, A1, F1	After 45 workers evicted, the rest took discharge
8-12.4	Kalimoni [s], Ruiru	39 workers		CPWU	J1, A1	Sacked after refusing to return
19.4-5.5	Thugi, Thika	85 labourers	8,925	CPWU	G1, E2	Union instructed a RTW
21.4 to 13.5	Rucra, Ruiru	400 men & women workers	56,000	CPWU	J2, E2, D2 & 'to set tasks themselves in future.'	Strikers refused Union RTW instruction; partial return with issues unresolved
25-8.4	Samuru, Thika	420 workers	2,940	CPWU	C3, G3	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved
25-9.4	Nanga, Mitubiri	130 workers	4,550	CPWU	B5	Union instructed RTW as precondition for airing grievances
28.4 to 7.5	Samuru, Thika	420 workers	26,460	CPWU	C3, G3	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved
3-8.5	Mangu, Thika	140 workers	4,900	CPWU	G3	Union secured RTW with issues left unresolved
11.5	Thugi, Thika	18 workers	126	CPWU	E2	Union secured RTW on old weeding task
16-19.9	Donyo Sabuk [1958] Ltd., [s]	300 workers	7,200	CPWU	A1: failure to introduce CBK wage scale; B2.	Union instructed RTW as precondition for airing grievances
29.9	Rua Ngonde, Makuyu	37 workers	74	-	B1	Cash in lieu of rations. RTW.
<b>Totals</b>	32	5,682 workers	360,001	-	-	-
<b>.1961.</b>						
14.4	Hatwara, Thika	150 male and female labourer [Kikuyu]	600	-	A3, F1	Arrears paid. Mangmt met workers reps.
5.9	Makuyu Coffee Plantation [Sisal Ltd.]	160 male and female labourers [Kikuyu]	3,760	CPWU	G3, H3, H4	No settlement
11-12.9	ibid.	ibid.	2,560	CPWU	G3, H3, H4	Wrkr remained sacked.
<b>Totals</b>	3	470 workers	6,920			

**Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location**

Donyo Sabuk	2	Thika	16	Ruiru	8	Makuyu	7	Mitubiri	2
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## Appendix 9

Disputes in Other Industries, Thika 1960<sup>19</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
27.1	Kakuzi Fibrelands [coffee and sisal] Makuyu	64 tractor drivers and turnboys	320	SPWU	A1	Wages inspector intervention. RTW. Unresolved.
26.1	Happy Valley Farm, Thika	10 cattle farm workers	120	CPWU	A1, C1	Union instruction to RTW.
18.2	Kenya Cannery, Thika	500 women casuals	500	KDCWU	F1	No further delay in issuing tickets. RTW
5-6.3	Panarama Farm, Ruiru	38 milkers and herdboys	456		G1	8 RTW. Remainder refused & discharged
29.2-4.3	Machule estate, Ruiru	60 female casuals on pineapple estate	1,440	-	F3, G2	RTW as precondition for discussing grievances. Labour inspector intervention.
11-16.3	Dandora sisal estate, Ruiru	500 workers	17,500	-	I2, A1, to control estate canteen	RTW as precondition for negotiations
15-17.3	E.A. Bag & Cordage, Ruiru	1,712 factory workers	36,910	TTWU	G1, G3	Reinstatement. Committee of Inquiry
24-6.3	Happy Valley Farm, Thika	10 cattle farm workers	120	CPWU	C1	Resolved. RTW
4.4	Nairobi City Council, Ruiru	40 road gang and sweepers	320	KLGWU	G1, G3	Reinstatement. Supervisor stripped of power to discharge. RTW
24-5.3	Makuyu Trading Co., Makuyu	8 duka workers	8	-	A1, B3	Employer conceded. RTW
6-12.4	B.E.A. Planting Co., Ruiru [sisal estate]	200 sisal cutters and field workers	200	CPWU	G3	RTW though 10 workers refused to return.
21-2.4	Samar estate, Maragua [sisal]	800 workers	11,200	SPWU	G1	Manager refused, sacked 20 'ringleaders'. 39 took discharge. RTW
5.4-5.5	Punda Milia estate, Makuyu [sisal & coffee]	900 workers	187,200	-	I3, Subsequently A1	30 workers evicted. Rest RTW.
11.4-4.5	E.A. Bag & Cordage, Ruiru	1,700 factory workers	219,322	TTWU	G1	'Troublemakers' dismissed. RTW
23.3-4.5	Sisal Ltd., Makuyu	800 workers	196,000	CPWU	A1, A5	RTW due to union intervention. 45 sacked.
21.4-9.5	Parkash Building and Construction Co., Thika	50 workers	7,200	EAFBCW	A1, C7	RTW after union intervention.
10.8	Donyo Sabuk'58, [sisal]	22 sisal decorticators	176	-	G1	Return or be sacked ultimatum. Workers decided to sign off.

<sup>19</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/205/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1960.

24.8-7.9	Kenya Cannery, Thika	215 permanent men 200 casual women	37,350	KDCWU	H1	Return or be sacked ultimatum. All workers dismissed.
4.11	Chui Estate, Mitubiri [sisal]	525 workers	2,362.5	SPWU	G3, I1	Redundancies remained. RTW after union intervention.
10.12	Mananja, Makuyu [sisal]	350 workers	2,100	SPWU	G3,F3	RTW after union intervention.
<b>Totals</b>	20	8,704	720,805	-	-	-

<b><i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/Location</i></b>									
Thika	5	Ruiru	7	Makuyu	5	Mitubiri	1	Donyo Sabuk	1

## Appendix 10

Coffee Strikes in Kiambu, 1960<sup>20</sup>

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Estate / Division</i>	<i>Number, type and gender of workers involved</i>	<i>Man Hours Lost</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Causes [prioritised]</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
11-14.1	Stella Estate, Lower Kiambu	50 Kikuyu	1,200	CPWU	B5, C7	A1, B5
2.5	Kifissia Estate, Kamiti	70 skilled and semi-skilled Kikuyu	1,680	CPWU	G3	RTW with promise of mediation after KFL intervention
9-16.5	Muthiaga Estate, Kamiti	3 men and 11 women [Kikuyu]	1,008	CPWU	G1	Wrks left employment rather than work under headman.
16.5	Kaiya Estate, Lower Kiambu	20 Kikuyu	40	-	E2	Task slightly reduced. RTW
20.5	Kasarini Estate, Lower Kiambu	450 Kikuyu	3,600	CPWU	A1, F1	RTW as precondition for mediation
24.5	Stella, Lower Kiambu	76 Kikuyu	2,640	CPWU	G3	No settlement. 12 arrested under Tresp.Ord. and 64 evicted under Res.Lab.Ord.
25.5	Gachego, Lower Kiambu	31 men and women [Kikuyu]	496	CPWU	H3, G3, B3, C1	RTW after Union intervention. Worker remained sacked.
26.5	Cheleta, Lower Kiambu	67 men and women [Kikuyu]	536	CPWU	G3	Workers evicted under Sect 18 of the Res. Lab. Ord.
25.6	Falcon Estate, Lower Kiambu	181 unskilled 'African' labourers	995.5	CPWU	E2	RTW after Union intervention. Task to be 'reviewed'
19.7	Welcome Farm, Limuru	48 female casuals & 10 permanent males [Kikuyu]	174	-	A1, J1	RTW after Union intervention. No change.
25-7.7	Kahora Estate, Kiambu	70 Kikuyu	1,470	CPWU	H3	RTW after Union intervention. No change.
27.7	Kianjibbi, Kiambu	6 headmen and 7 unskilled [Kikuyu and Embu]	22.5	-	A1, E2	7 workers sacked.
1.8	Barua, Kiambu	113 Kikuyu	2,373	CPWU	G2	RTW after Union intervention. Clerk dismissed.
4.8	Yara, Upper Kiambu	260 Kikuyu	1,170	CPWU	Start work an hr later, B3.	RTW as precondition for mediation after LO intervention.
14.9	Three Rivers, Upper Kiambu	28 Kikuyu	1,344	CPWU	H3, G3	Strikers evicted.

<sup>20</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/205/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1960.

Oct.20th	Kilooma, Kiambu	220 Kikuyu	1,760	-	Kenyatta Day	-
Oct.20th	Kogeria, Kiambu	156 Kikuyu	1,248	-	Kenyatta Day	-
Oct.20th	Barua, Kiambu	112 Kikuyu	890	-	Kenyatta Day	-
Oct.20th	Kubu, Kiambu	126 Kikuyu	1,008	-	Kenyatta Day	-
Oct.20th	Nyala, Kiambu	34 Kikuyu	272	-	Kenyatta Day	-
Oct.21st	Kihingo, Kabete	102 Kikuyu	306	CPWU	G1	Manager agreed. RTW.
1.12	Ngorongo, Upper Kiambu	96 coffee pickers [Kikuyu]	983	CPWU	E2	Strikers negotiated settlement. RTW.
-	Kasarini	-	-	-	-	-
-	Kimarauli	-	-	-	-	-
-	Ibonia	-	-	-	-	-
-	Kacharoba	-	-	-	-	-
-	Ngorongo, Upper Kiambu	-	-	-	-	-
-	Hawkins	-	-	-	-	-
-	Kogeria	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	29	2,347	25,216	-	-	-

<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location</i>							
Upper Kiambu	3	Lower Kiambu	6	Kiambu	8	Kamiti	2
Kabete	1	Nairobi	1	Limuru	1		

### Appendix 11

Disputes in Other Industries, Kiambu, 1959-60<sup>21</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1959.</b>						
21.2.	Nairobi Wattle Co. Ltd., Kiambu	40 women general labourers	80	-	Treble pay for Sunday work instead of double pay	Workers told to go back on existing conds or no Sun work at all. Accepted latter. RTW
-	Kiambu County Council & missions	-	-	-	-	-
-	Bata Shoe Co., Limuru/Kiambu	-	-	-	-	-
-	Karirana tea estate, Limuru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Mabroukie tea estate, Limuru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Limuru Tea Company, Limuru	-	-	-	-	-
	6	-	-	-	-	-
<b>.1960.</b>						
15.2	Gordhandas Dharamshi & Bros sawmills in Kikuyu & Limuru	100 at Limuru 100 at Kikuyu	3,200	KTFWU	G1, A2	Deduction restored. Removal of headman unresolved.
11.6	Uttam Singh Brar Matathia sawmill	58 skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled	464	KTFWU	A1	RTW after union intervention.
29.7	J. Pettifer, Riara Bridge	2 unskilled	18		G3, A3	Dispute resolved. RTW
1.9	Kinale Forest Station, Mutathia	92 resident labourers	6,624	KCSU	J5, E2, I1	Union intervention. 80 redundancies withdrawn on condition of completing set task. 12 discharged on 12/9.
14.9	Limuru Tea Strike, various estates	2,090 workers	222,760	TPWU	A1, abolition of ticket system and daily rates	Union instructed RTW. Recognition discussed with employers. Other demands dropped
23.11	Madubhai Patel Building contractor, Limuru	10 casual labourers	60	EAFBCW	A3	Workers paid up & sacked
19.12	Bachitter Singh Amar, Building contractor, Kiambu	46 labourers	736	EAFBCW	H1, A1, G3	Union negotiated increase on basis of longer working day
<b>Totals</b>	7	2,498	233,862	-	-	-

<sup>21</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/207/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1959;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/205/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1960.



<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/Location</i>							
Upper Kiambu	3	Lower Kiambu	6	Kiambu	8	Kamiti	2
Kabete	1	Nairobi	1	Limuru	1		

### *Appendix 12*

*Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1961*<sup>22</sup>

<i>Industrial Group</i>	<i>Number of Stoppages</i>	<i>Number of Workers Involved</i>	<i>Number of Man-days Lost</i>
Agriculture	67	10,690	38,241
Mining and Quarrying	6	484	4,864
Building/ Construction	20	2,660	25,120
Manufacturing	39	8,207	40,170
Electricity Generation and Supply	-	-	-
Transport	7	1,320	3,268
Docks	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	26	2,716	7,291
Kenya Government, High Commission Services and Local Authorities	2	600	1,500
<b>Totals</b>	167	26,677	120,454

<sup>22</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/100: L.D.A.R. 1961.

## Appendix 13

Disputes in Other Industries, Thika 1961-2<sup>23</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1961.</b>						
9.1	K.E.M.E. Co. Ltd, Thika	24 factory workers	360	KEWU	Demand that union agreed wage rates be paid	Union intervention. RTW as precondition for negotiations
19-26.1	Anglo-French sisal estate	680 field workers	33,320	SPWU	H3, G1	Refused union instruct RTW. KFL intervention. RTW.
13.2	Happy Valley Farm, Thika	6 cattle farm workers	42	-	A1	Manager refused. Workers completed ticket & took discharge
14.3	Metal Box of E.A., Thika	323 skilled and unskilled	119,951	KEWU	A1.No agreement after conciliator's intervention	Union instructed RTW. New basis for calculating wages.
13.4	VD Stone Quarries, Thika	52 workers	2,912	EAFBCW	A3,F1,G3	Arrears partly repaid and hours ltd. Union intervention. RTW.
8.6	Kenhard, Thika	63 quarry workers	523	EAFBCW	A1,E2	Strikers sacked, quarry closed
3.7	Bulley's Tannery, Thika	140 leather workers and junior supervisors	900	KSLWU	H1,H3	Union intervention. Branch sec sacked with ex-gratia payment. RTW.
1.9	Mananja estate, Makuyu	250 factory and field workers	1,500	-	G1	Lab Off.intervention. RTW.
18-21.12	Nath Bros Ltd., Thika	380 textile workers	9,120	TTWU	I1	Lab Off intervention: No Settlement. Strike continued
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1,918</b>	<b>168,628</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>.1962.</b>						
8.1	Bulley's Tanneries, Thika	140 skilled and unskilled	1,260	-	-	-
18.1	Nath Bros Ltd., Thika	380 rayon spinning & knitting textile workers	99,180	TTWU	-	-
1.2	Nath Bros Ltd.	As above	3,420	TTWU	-	-
17-24.3	Nairobi County and Thika Urban District Councils	97 essential and non-essential workers	10,526	KLGWU	-	-
24.4	Munyu sisal estate, Thika	220 skilled and unskilled	8,880	SPWU	-	-
18.6	K.E.M.E. Ltd., Thika	50 skilled and unskilled	400	KEWU	J1	RTW. Strike called off
18.6	Metal Box Co. Ltd., Thika	380 skilled and unskilled	3,040	KEWU	J1	Strike called off RTW.

<sup>23</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/206/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1961;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/15/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 2/1/62 - 1R7/8/62.

21.7	Nairobi County and Thika Urban District Councils	118/Thika and 33/Ruiru. Skilled and semi-skilled	3,171	KLGWU	C7,F1,G3,C1	Settled by union and LD.
1.8	Munyu sisal estate, Thika	15 manual labourers	120	SPWU	E2	Slight reduction of tasks. RTW.
8-9.8	Munyu sisal estate, Thika	17 manual labourers	272	SPWU	Change of task: decorticating to weeding at decorticating rate	Union agreed to flexible working
4-10.8	Ngoliba estate, Mitubiri	400 skilled and unskilled	22,400	SPWU	A2,A6	A6 resolved.
5.9	Juja Farm, Ruiru	400 labourers	2,400	-	-	-
5.9	Dodhia Trading Store, Ruiru	42 labourers and drivers	672	-	-	-
18.9	Ministry of Education, Thika	268 teachers.[Kikuyu, Kamba,Nyanza]	37,520	-	-	-
1.10.	M/S Devji Meghji & Bros., Ruiru	32 drivers and labourers. [Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba]	256	-	-	-
5.10.	Munyu sisal estate, Thika	180 skilled and unskilled labour. [Luo,Kikuyu,Kamba]	1,440	SPWU	-	-
20.10.	Yatta Ranch	108 [Kikuyu, Kamba, Wambere, Nyanza]	2,412	-	-	-
22.10.	Samar estate, Makuyu	600 skilled and unskilled. [Kikuyu, Kamba, Nyanza]	4,800	SPWU	-	-
5.11	Lagar estate	47 manual labour. [Kikuyu, Nyanza]	1,128	-	-	-
19.12	Ruiru Auto Garage	7 skilled and unskilled. [Kamba, Kikuyu, Taita]	280	TAWU	G3,A3, H2.	LO intervention. Employer & Un agreed RTW. Workers remained sacked but arrears paid to rest.
<b>Totals</b>	20	3,914	203,577	-	-	-

***Distribution of Strikes by Ward/ Location***

District wide teachers strike

Donyo Sabuk	1	Thika	18	Ruiru	4	Makuyu	2	Mitubiri	1	Other	3
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## Appendix 14

Coffee Strikes in Kiambu, 1961<sup>24</sup>

Dates	Estate / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
16.1	Kasarani Estate [1959] Ltd.	279 women labourers [Kikuyu]	11,439	CPWU	E2	CPWU instructed RTW
18.1	Kasarani Estate [1959] Ltd.	66 male labourers [Kikuyu]	1,782	CPWU	F1	CPWU instructed acceptance. RTW
19.1	Kasarani Estate [1959] Ltd.	63 factory workers [Kikuyu]	1,260	CPWU	J1	RTW
27.2	Kimarauli Estate [G.V.Criticos]	68 labourers [Kikuyu]	9,588	CPWU	G3,H3	CPWU instructed RTW
2.5	Ibonia Estate, Kiambu	144 labourers [Kikuyu]	9,072	CPWU	A4,E1	No settlement
16.5	Amberley Parva Estate, Kabete	23 female pickers [Kikuyu]	896	CPWU	E2	No settlement
24.5	Hawkins Estate, Rosslyn	119 labourers [Kikuyu]	1,904	CPWU	E2,G3	Task reduced; workers reinstated
7-8.6	Matundu Estate, Kabete	127 male and 45 women labourers	2,912	CPWU	E2,J1	RTW on a 'time' basis
16.8	Stella Estate, Lower Kiambu	54 labourers [Kikuyu]	1,296	-	A3	Workers paid.
29.9	Kubu Estate, Rosslyn	53 labourers [Kikuyu]	424	CPWU	G3,H1	RTW.No settlement.
21-4.11	Crossroads Estate, Kabete	21 labourers [Kikuyu]	504	CPWU	E2,A1	RTW precond for negs.
21-4.11	Tigiri Estate, Kabete	55 labourers [Kikuyu]	1,320	CPWU	E2,A1	RTW precond for negs.
21-4.11	Nyari Estate, Rosslyn	96 labourers [Kikuyu]	2,304	CPWU	E2,A1	RTW precond for negs.
21-4.11	Buku Estate, Rosslyn	67 labourers [Kikuyu]	1,608	CPWU	E2,A1	RTW as precond for KFL negs with KCGA
21-4.11	Hawkins Estate, Rosslyn	105 labourers [Kikuyu]	2,520	CPWU	E2,A1	RTW as precond for KFL negs with KCGA
21-4.11	Hillcrest Estate, Rosslyn	65 labourers [Kikuyu]	2,080	CPWU	G3, E2	Reinstatement. RTW as precond for CPWU negs with KCGA
21-4.11	Kihingo Estate, Rosslyn	-	-	CPWU	-	-
25-8.11	Hawkins Estate, Rosslyn	97 labourers [Kikuyu]	2,231	CPWU	E2	No settlement. Workers took their discharge.
11.12	Mabroukie Ltd., Kibubuti Estate, Limuru	178 labourers [Kikuyu]	133.5	-	E2	No settlement.
<b>Totals</b>	19	1,725	53,273.5	-	-	-

## Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location

Kiambu	2	Lower Kiambu	1	Rosslyn	7	Limuru	1
Kabete	4	Kasarani	3				

<sup>24</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/206/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1961.

## Appendix 15

Disputes in Other Industries, Kiambu 1961-3<sup>25</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1961.</b>						
30.9-23.10	E.A. Bata Shoe Co. Limuru	953 shoe operators	133,405	KSLWU	H1	Recognition & no victimisation
30.10.	Farm Hotel, Limuru	15 hotel workers	120	DHWU	G3	KFL intervention. Worker remained sacked.
13.12	Dinhams Hotel, Limuru	18 labourers	126	DHWU	A5,G3	Not settled. No medical certificate produced. Union not accept RTWas precod for negs. 16 strikers sacked.
22.12	Hasham Javer, Kikuyu	13 road transport labourers	104	TAWU	G3,I1,A1	Settled.Reinstatement. RTW. Redundancies and wages discussed at further meeting with L.I.
28.12	EA Bata Shoe Co. Limuru	800 shoe operators	4,800	KSLWU	G1	Settled. Discharges cancelled. Issues discussed by local neg comm
<b>Totals</b>	5	1,799	138,555	-	-	-
<b>.1962.</b>						
17.3	Nairobi City Council, Tigoni Depot, Limuru	29 road gang	1,682	KLGWU	-	-
26-7.3	Christian Churches Educational Association	1400 teachers	21,000	KNUT	-	-
	Holy Ghost Mission District Educational Board	included in above figures	-	-	-	-
4-5.4	Gathonea Githua, contractor	82 tree fellers and cutters	1,148	-	-	-
	Lari Farm Ltd., Uplands	Included in above figures	-	-	-	-
-29.5	National & Grindlay Bank, Kiambu	15 African and Asian clerks	45	KDCWU	-	-
28-9.5	Standard Bank of South Africa, Kiambu	10 African and Asian clerks	160	KDCWU	-	-
8-12.6	E.A. Bata Shoe Co., Limuru	980 shoe operatives	25,480	KSLWU	-	-
24.9	Uplands Bacon Factory, Kiambu	314 skilled and unskilled	1,884	-	-	-

<sup>25</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/206/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1961;  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/15/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 2/1/62 - 1R7/8/62;  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/16/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 14/1/63 - 24/8/63;  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/18/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 2, 2/9/63 - 9/1/64.

22.11	E.A. Bata Shoe Co., Limuru	1,000 operatives	-	KSLWU	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	10	3,830	51,399	-	-	-
<b>.1963.</b>						
18-22.7	Karirana tea estate, Limuru	350 unskilled	12,600	TPWU	-	-
26.10-5.11	Limuru service station	9 semi-skilled	720	TAWU	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	2	359	13,320	-	-	-

<b>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/Location</b>							
Upper Kiambu	3	Lower Kiambu	6	Kiambu	8	Kamiti	2
Kabete	1	Nairobi	1	Limuru	1		

**Appendix 16**  
*Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1962*<sup>26</sup>

<b>Industrial Group</b>	<b>Number of stoppages</b>	<b>Number of Workers involved</b>	<b>Number of Man-days Lost</b>
Agriculture	78	73,327	266,711
Mining and Quarrying	1	42	42
Building and Construction	5	366	366
Manufacturing	99	11,886	58,995
Electricity Generation and Supply			
Transport	9	1,902	5,784
Docks			
Miscellaneous	68	8,484	26,499
Kenya Government, East Africa Common Services and Local Authority	25	36,425	387,402
<b>Totals</b>	285	132,433	745,799

<sup>26</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/104; L.D.A.R. 1962.

## Appendix 17

Coffee Strikes in Thika, 1962 <sup>27</sup>

Dates	Estate / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
11.6	Kirimiri, Makuyu	60 labourers	480	SCPWU	H1	Strike cancelled
12.6	Kakuzi Fibrelands Ltd. / Coffee Section, Makuyu	78 labourers	234	SCPWU	H1	Strike cancelled
12.6	Matungulu / Socfinaf, Makuyu	35 labourers	280	SCPWU	H1	Strike cancelled
14-17.6	Plover's Haunt, Ruiru	15 labourers [Kikuyu]	400	SCPWU	G1	Wrks remain sacked
19-23.6	<b>General Strike</b> Various estates in Thika, Ruiru, Donyo Sabuk and Mitubiri	28,000	896,000	SCPWU	J2, H1	Union called off strike with appt of board of inquiry by Ministry of Labour
25.6	Mchana / Socfinaf, Ruiru	160 workers	6,400	SCPWU	F2, G1	RTW
25.6	Kilimakogi, Makuyu	50 workers	-	-	A1	-
26-30.6	Crops Ltd., Ruiru	65 workers	2,600	SCPWU	G3	RTW precond for negs.
2-12.7	Tatu / Socfinaf, Ruiru	450 workers [Kikuyu]	39,600	SCPWU	E2, G2, G1	No settlement
3.7	Plover's Haunt, Ruiru	60 workers [Kikuyu]	240	SCPWU	E2, G1	No settlement
9-31.7	Ngewe / Socfinaf, Ruiru	197 workers [Kikuyu and Luo]	29,156	SCPWU	E2, G2	No settlement
10.7	H.K.S. Estate, Ruiru	50 workers [Kikuyu and Kamba]	400	SCPWU	G3, E2, F2, G2, G1	RTW precond for negs.
2.8	Kiaora / Criticos, Ruiru	400 m/f, sk/semi-sk., cof/sis workers [Kikuyu]	3200 approx.	SCPWU	J3, I1, J1	RTW
10.8	Mrefu, Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 165 m/f workers	1,320	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	Theta, Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 143 m/f workers	1,144	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	H.K.S., Theta Rd, Ruiru	-	-	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	Crops Ltd., Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 82 m/f workers	656	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	Riverside, Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 125 m/f workers	1,000	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	Maanda, Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 44 m/f workers	352	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	Tyn-y-Bryn, Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 85 m/f workers	680	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW

<sup>27</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/15/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 2/1/62 - 1R7/8/62.

10.8	Surrey, Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 84 m/f workers	672	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
10.8	Marula Theta Rd, Ruiru	Approx. 45 m/f workers	360	SCPWU	J3, J1	RTW
23.9	Oaklands /Socfinaf, Ruiru	90 labourers [K.E.M.]	720	-	-	-
25.9	Kanyeri, Thika	75 labourers [Kikuyu]	1,200	-	-	-
20.10.	Yatta Ranch, Thika	108 workers	108	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	24 + General Strike	30,666	987,202	-	-	-

<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location</i>						
Thika	2	Ruiru	18	Makuyu	4	General Strike in All Areas

### Appendix 18

#### *Coffee Strikes in Kiambu, 1962*<sup>28</sup>

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Estate / Division</i>	<i>Number, type and gender of workers involved</i>	<i>Man Hours Lost</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Causes [prioritised]</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
31.5- 7.6	Gakomo Estate, Kiambu	78 unskilled workers	3,071	SCPWU	-	-
12.6	Murita Estate	52 Kikuyu workers	1,664	SCPWU	-	-
16.6	Kibubuti Estate, Limuru	350 Kikuyu workers	19,250	SCPWU	-	-
19.6	<b>General Strike</b> Approx. 200 coffee estates	<b>15,000 Kikuyu workers</b>	<b>480,000</b>	<b>SCPWU</b>	<b>H1, J2</b>	<b>Union called off strike with appt of board of inquiry by Ministry of Labour</b>
23.6	Welcome Farm	50 Kikuyu workers	800	SCPWU	H1	-
25.6	Kasarini Estate, Lower Kiambu	500 Kikuyu workers	8,000	SCPWU	H1	-
25.6	Kiltannon Estate	120 Kikuyu workers	5,640	SCPWU	H1	-
26.6	Gakomo Estate, Kiambu	78 Kikuyu workers	3,666	SCPWU	H1	-
27.6	Cheleta Estate	150 Kikuyu workers	1,200	SCPWU	H1, G2	-
27.6	Kogeria	80 Kikuyu workers	1,280	SCPWU	H1	-
29.6	Waitangi Estate	60 Kikuyu workers	900	SCPWU	H1	-
30.6	Tutu Estate	90 Kikuyu workers	630	SCPWU	H1	-
1.7	Gakomo Estate	78	6,786	SCPWU	H1	-
1.7	Kiltannon	120	4,800	SCPWU	H1	-
1.7	Waitangi Estate	60	10,080	SCPWU	H1	-
1.7	Tutu Estate	90	630	SCPWU	H1	-

<sup>28</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/15/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 2/1/62 - 1R7/8/62.



1-3.8	Katunda Estate, Kiambu	80 unskilled workers	1,440	SCPWU	II, G3	Manager agreed to reinstate 7 of 11 workers.
3-5.8	Farran Estate, Kiambu	35 coffee pickers	840	SCPWU	II, G3	Workers discharged.
-	Kibubuti	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	218 estates including General Strike	17,071	550,677	-	-	-

### Appendix 19

*Stoppages of Work caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1963*<sup>29</sup>

<b>Industrial Group</b>	<b>Number of Stoppages</b>	<b>Number of Workers Involved</b>	<b>Number of Man-days lost</b>
Agriculture	81	23,820	62,602
Mining and Quarrying	5	391	2,170
Manufacturing	66	8,337	37,324
Building and Construction	6	664	1,555
Electricity, water and sanitary services	1	44	38
Commerce	40	14,033	103,973
Transport, storage and Communications	9	2,151	13,890
Docks	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	14	1,212	2,987
Public Services:			
Kenya Government	1	100	100
Local Authorities	4	2,281	8,443
East Africa Common Services	3	1,395	2,267
<b>Totals</b>	230	54,428	235,349

<sup>29</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/106:L.D.A.R. 1963.

## Appendix 20

Coffee Strikes in Thika District, 1963<sup>30</sup>

Dates	Estate / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
11-28.2	Makuyu Coffee Plantation / Sisal Ltd., Makuyu	650 skilled and unskilled	93,600	SCPWU	-	-
27-31.3	Kiboko, Thika	95 m & 5 f skilled and unskilled.	3,800	KCPWU	G2, F3, G3	-
12.6	Matungulu/ Socfinaf, Donyo Sabuk	195 unskilled	1,560	SCPWU	E2	Agreed that weeding task be set according to density of grass
19-22.6	Tatu / Socfinaf, Ruiru	302 m and 109 f	11,508	SCPWU	E2	Referred to national level with K.C.G.A.
21.6	Oaklands / Socfinaf, Ruiru	169 m and 100 f	2,152	SCPWU	E2	Agreed to reduce task
21.6	Mr. Pancha Mathia, Ruiru	45 unskilled females	360	SCPWU	E2	RTW on their 'normal' task
24-5.6	Mellerstane, Thika	40 unskilled	640	SCPWU	E2, A1	RTW. No change.
29-30.6	Mchana, Ruiru	44 unskilled females	616	SCPWU	E2	RTW. Reduction of task.
26.6	Coffee Estate Ltd., Ruiru	45 unskilled [Kikuyu & Luo]	360	-	-	-
June	Chui, Mitubiri	-	-	-	-	-
June	Como Coffee Estate, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
4-5.7	Tatu/Socfinaf, Ruiru	302 m and 109 f	6,576	SCPWU	E2	RTW on Union instruction. Tasks remained same.
5.7	Ndaraki, Ruiru	20 m and 80 f	800	SCPWU	E2	RTW on Union instruction
5.7	Azania, Ruiru	140 m & f, skilled and unskilled	1,120	SCPWU	F3, G3	RTW. Worker paid wages in lieu of notice
5-15.7	Monyaka, Thika	120 unskilled	10,560	SCPWU	G2, G1	RTW prior to negs.
9.7	Mchana, Ruiru	100 m and 45 f	1,160	SCPWU	E2	RTW on Union instruction
19.7	Crops Ltd, Ruiru	68 unskilled m	544	SCPWU	E2	RTW. Unresolved.
24.7	Tatu/ Socfinaf, Ruiru	26 m & f	52	SCPWU	E2	RTW after manager had addressed strikers
10-13.7	Ayania, Kimorchu	150 unskilled	4,800	SCPWU	Demand for removal of fellow worker	RTW.
July	Karamaini	-	-	-	-	-
9-10.8	Mrefu, Ruiru	16 m and 14 f	360	SCPWU	E2	Employer agreed to drop task work and adopt hourly system.
15.8	Rubislaw, Thika	40 m and 20 f	240	SCPWU	'In support of KANU to grant Thika county status.'	RTW.

<sup>30</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/ 8/16/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 14/1/63 - 24/8/63;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/18/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Vol 2, 2/9/63 - 9/1/64.

15.8	Kihoto, Thika	100 male and female skilled and unskilled workers	800		'In support of KANU to grant Thika county status.'	RTW.
17-18.8	Kayatta, Donyo Sabuk	75 unskilled	900	SCPWU	Delay implementing Verjee Award	RTW.
13-14.9	Karamaini, Thika	224 m and 240 f	5,568	SCPWU	Reinstatement of KANU Youth Wing official sacked for misconduct	RTW 'pending investigations'
8-10.11	Manyika, Thika	100 unskilled	1,400	KPAWU	H3, G1, G2	Reinstatement. RTW
9-16.11	Burgeret / Thika Farm, Thika	65 unskilled	3,380	KPAWU	G1	RTW. Unresolved.
18-23.12	Kiboko, Thika	130 unskilled	5,200	KPAWU	E2	RTW
<b>Totals</b>	29	3,983	158,056	-	-	-

<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/Location</i>											
Thika	11	Donyo Sabuk	2	Ruiru	12	Makuyu	1	Mitubiri	1	Other	1

### Appendix 21

#### *Disputes in Other Industries, Thika 1963-4*<sup>31</sup>

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Workplace / Division</i>	<i>Number, type and gender of workers involved</i>	<i>Man Hours Lost</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Causes [prioritised]</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
<b>.1963.</b>						
7-10.1	Donyo Sabuk's 58 sisal estate	676 skilled and unskilled, including cutters	21,632	SCPWU	Delay intro new cutting rates, A6, A1 as per union agmt, G1, G2	-
30.1-1.2	Nemchand & Co., Thika	22 skilled and unskilled	352	TAWU	H1, A1 [50/-]	LO intervention. Union recog & 8.50/- rise
1.2	Thika General Stores	14 skilled and unskilled	112	TAWU	J1 [Nemchand]	RTW.
22-5.2	Prakesh Building and Construction Ltd., Thika	44 skilled and unskilled	1,308	EAFBCW	A3, F1, overtime & leave pay, C3, C7	Settled. RTW.
2-16.2	Shah Vershi Devshi & Co. Ltd., Thika	120 workers	10,656	TAWU	C3, H1, C7	-
11.2	Sisal Limited, Makuyu	650 workers [Kikuyu and Maragoli]	93,600	-	-	-
20-1.2	Mananja sisal estate, Makuyu	220 artisans and unskilled	3,520	SCPWU	G3, E2, A3	Settled. RTW.

<sup>31</sup> K.N.A./ ABK/8/16/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 14/1/63 - 24/8/63;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/18/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Vol 2, 2/9/63 - 9/1/64;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/17/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports 10/1/64 - 30/12/64.

25.4	R.L.Shah & Co. Ltd.	25 petrol assistants and shop boys [Wambu & Kikuyu]	200	-	-	-
6-11.5	Ngoliba sisal estate, Mitubiri	33 semi-skilled and unskilled	1,452	SCPWU	Intro of new brushing apparatus following rejection of fibre by company buyers in UK and Kenya due to low standard of brushing. Removal of new apparatus in brushing section, juveniles to help in brushing gang in aranging fibre. Reinstatement of 5 workers accused by mangmt as being 'ring leaders'.	-
30.5	Kakuzi Fibrelands, Mitubiri,	600 skilled and semi-skilled	7,200	SCPWU	A2	RTW. Wage cuts restored
5-6.6	Metal Box Co., Thika	391 males & 56 females. Skilled and unskilled	5,364	KEWU	11, absence of pay scales for tinsmiths	RTW as precondition for negs
29.6	Soy Settlement Ltd.	148 unskilled Kikuyu	1,120	-	-	-
5.7	Azania sisal estate	140 men and women. Unskilled.	1,120	SCPWU	F3, G3	Worker paid off and sacked
10-13-7	Kimorchu sisal estate	150 unskilled	4,800	SCPWU	Removal of worker alleged by other workers to be a 'black sheep'	128 workers RTW.
15.8	Gloria Ltd.	100 unskilled [Kikuyu]	800	-	-	-
17.10.	K.E.M.E. Ltd., Thika	25 skilled and unskilled	200	KEWU	Implementation of Sept '63 agmt	Union Intervened. RTW pending negs
18-23.10	K.E.M.E. Ltd., Thika	As above	1,000	KEWU	Demanded implementation of Sept agmt & job classification	Union instruct workers RTW to begin negs
8.11		100 unskilled [Kikuyu]	3,380	-	-	-
22-31.11	K.E.M.E. Ltd., Thika	As above	1,575	KEWU	Demanded implementation of Sept' agmt 63	Union intervened RTW pending negs.
16-24.12	Magomoni estate	115 unskilled	7,360	KPAWU	E2	Union and LO Intervention. RTW
<b>Totals</b>	20	3,679	166,751		-	-
<b>.1964.</b>						
15.1	Post Office [E.A.C.S.O.], Thika	25 telephone operators	200	EAPTWU	J1, G1	Board of inquiry. RTW
25.1	Thika Motor Services, Thika	19 skilled and unskilled	1,368	TAWU	H1	Unresolved

20.1-3.2	Ruiru Auto Garage, Ruiru	5 workers	560	TAWU	H1	KFL intervention RTW
5-6.6	Kakuzi Fibrelands, Mitubiri	1096 semi and unskilled	17,536	-	Entitlement to public hol	-
8-10.6	Dodhia Trading Store, Thika	41 skilled and unskilled	861	DHWU	G3, G1	KFL & LO intervention. Noresolution. RTW
12.6	Kithimu pineapple estate, Makuyu	74 skilled	407	KPAWU	E2	LO intervention. RTW. Return to original task.
1-5.7	December 12th, Hotel, Thika	10 workers	320	DHWU	A3	Airrears paid. RTW
1-7.7	Several Asian employers of domestic servants, Thika	164 domestic servants	6,560	DHWU	C7	Employers agreed to implement recommendations
15-6.9	East African Power & Lighting Co., Thika	65 skilled and unskilled	601.25	KEWU	J1, G2	Union instruct RTW.
13-4.11	Nimak pineapple estate	39 unskilled	286	KPAWU	E2	Unsettled. Union instruct RTW pending negs. Workers refused to undertake set task.
14.11	United Textile Industries Ltd., Thika	277 skilled and unskilled	2,216	TTWU	Removal of lawyer as mangmt rep	Agreed that lawyer would not be present at negs. RTW.
16.11	Bulley's Tanneries Ltd., Thika	107 unskilled & semi-skilled	53.5	KSLWU	Worker suspended, F2	Suspension lifted RTW
23.12	E.A. Bag & Cordage Co. Ltd., Thika	200 factory operatives	400	TTWU	A4	LO intervened. RTW as bonuses were paid.
-	Juja Farms Ltd., Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	14	2,122	31,368.75			

***Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location***

Donyo Sabuk	1	Thika	17	Ruiru	2	Makuyu	3	Mitubiri	3	Other	8
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**Appendix 22**  
*Coffee Strikes in Kiambu, 1963-6* <sup>32</sup>

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Estate / Division</i>	<i>Number, type and gender of workers involved</i>	<i>Man Hours Lost</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Causes [prioritised]</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
<b>.1963.</b>						
16-23.4	Kogeria Estate, Kiambu	28 women and 10 male unskilled workers	2,356	SCPWU	G3	RTW. Unresolved.
18-19.4	Ngorongo Estate, Kiambu	36 male and 18 women workers	720		E2	RTW
26.6	Toritu Estate, Kiambu	46 men and 21 women unskilled workers	536	SCPWU	E2	RTW. Task reduced.
12.7	Nyeri Estate, Kiambu	59 unskilled workers	472	SCPWU	G1	RTW. Headman dismissed.
16-20.7	Kasarini Estate, Kiambu	187 unskilled workers	6,732	SCPWU	E2	RTW on Union instruction. Workers went on go-slow.
17.7	Kachoroba Estate, Kiambu	285 unskilled workers	-	SCPWU	H3, G3	RTW. Reinstatement.
13-15.8	Loresho Estate, Kiambu	51 men and 43 women workers	1,072	KPAWU	G1	RTW prior to negs.
3-4.9	Eyresome Park Estate, Kiambu	7 men and 6 women unskilled workers	208	-	A2, G3	Pay cuts restored. Discharges remained.
18.9	MacWatt Estate, Kaimbu	15 unskilled workers	120	KPAWU	G3	All reinstated for 1 month and then discharged.
23-5.9	Kianjibbi Estate, Kiambu	126 unskilled workers	3,024	KPAWU	G3	Reinstatement
11-19.10	Kiora Estate, Kaimbu	170 unskilled workers	11,560	KPAWU	D2, E2	Unresolved.
17-20.10	Fairview Estate, Kiambu	103 unskilled workers	3,090	KPAWU	J1	RTW. Ag'tmt that workers would make up their picking lost during strike.
2-3.12	Deepdene, Kiambu	136 unskilled male and female workers	3,264	KPAWU	G2	RTW. Headman remained in place.
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1,347</b>	<b>31,154</b>			
<b>.1964.</b>						
15-20.1	Toro Farm Estate, Kiambu	18 unskilled workers	20	KPAWU	E2	LO intervention. Workers abide by mangmt instructions providing tasks reasonable for 8 hour day.

<sup>32</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/16/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports /Vol 1, 14/1/63 - 24/8/63;  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/18/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Vol 2, 2/9/63 - 9/1/64;  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/17/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports 10/1/64 - 30/12/64.  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/19/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Volume 3, 4/1/65 - 14/5/66;  
 K.N.A./ABK/ 8/78/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1966-7.

1.8	Kilooma Estate, Kiambu	21 unskilled workers	84	-	G1,G2	LO intervention. Headman warned. RTW.
26.8	Gachego Estate, Kiambu	26 unskilled seasonal workers	130	KPAWU	E2	LO intervention. Tasks reduced. RTW
30.11	Ngorongo Estate, Kiambu	39 female pickers	280	KPAWU	Workers refused to sign for tools.	LO intervention. Worker reps witness and sign for issue of tools.
<b>Totals</b>	4	104	514			
<b>.1965.</b>						
4.1	Cheleta Estate, Estate	279 skilled and unskilled	4,455	KPAWU	G1	LO and Bransec achieved RTW. Allegs to be invest by LO
5-7.1	Runda Estate, Estate	400 labourers	6,400	KPAWU	G1,G2	LO intervention. Workers unable 'to substantiate' allegs
25-8.5	Kaiya Estate, Kiambu	32 unskilled	1,024	KPAWU	E2	LO intervention. Employer abandoned task work and went over to 8 hour days
1.11	Kamundu Estate, Kiambu	180 unskilled	630		Protested resign of manager	RTW as mangmt agreed to reconsider
18.11	Kamundu Estate, Kiambu	180 unskilled	810		Demanded removal of new manager, G2	LO intervention. RTW precond for negs
<b>Totals</b>	5	1,071	13,319			
<b>.1966.</b>						
2-9.6	Kacharoba [tea and coffee] estate, Kiambu	370 semi-skilled and unskilled	19,663	KPAWU	E2,G3,C4	Union withdrew task grievance and accepted dismissals for eco reasons.
5-6.7	Kacharoba	350 unskilled	5,616	KPAWU	E2, pay at daily rate	Union cautioned that unlawful to strike whilst negs were underway. RTW
31.8	Fanrose estate	36 unskilled	185	-	E2	Task reduced. RTW.
17.10.	Gigirie, Kiambu	120 male amd female	242	KPAWU	G3	Reinstatement. RTW
23-24.11	Ngorongo, Kiambu	41 unskilled	779	KPAWU	E2	Tasks reduced. RTW
<b>Totals</b>	5	917	26,485			

**Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location**

Upper Kiambu	3	Lower Kiambu	6	Kiambu	8	Kamiti	2
Kabete	1	Nairobi	1	Limuru	1		

## Appendix 23

*Stoppages of work Caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1964* <sup>33</sup>

<i>Industrial Group</i>	<i>Number of Stoppages</i>	<i>Number of Workers Involved</i>	<i>Number of Man-Days Lost</i>
Agriculture	127	41,214	99,426
Mining and Quarrying	3	709	6,333
Manufacturing	33	4,555	8,689
Building and Construction	8	1,128	5,542
Electricity, Water and Sanitary Services	7	538	465
Commerce	60	3,328	13,958
Transport, Storage and Communications [other than docks]	14	3,489	7,721
Docks	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	15	1,050	4,489
<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>56,011</b>	<b>146,623</b>
Kenya Government	-	-	-
Local Authority	3	2,266	7,123
E.A.C.S.O.	24	8,878	14,021
<b>Total All Employment</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>67,155</b>	<b>167,767</b>

<sup>33</sup> P.R.O./CO/544/108: L.D.A.R. 1964.



## Appendix 24

## Coffee Strikes in Thika, 1964-6

Dates	Estate/ Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1964.</b>						
13.4	Kihoto farm, Thika	150 farm labourers	2,400	KPAWU	G3	RTW instructed by union as precondition for negs.
11-14.5	Matungulu/ Socfinaf, Thika	423 workers	3,384	KPAWU	E2	RTW instructed by union as precondition for negs.
20.5	Mangu, Thika	47 women	-	KPAWU	-	-
14-18.8	Point Mazuri, Makuyu	43 labourers 2 dom. servants	1,032	KPAWU	Refusal of workers to work with labourer/management spy.	Union and LO intervention. RTW after labourer concerned advised to leave farm to defuse tension.
18.8	Muevera, Ruiru	47 milkers	752	KPAWU	G3	RTW, Dismissals withdrawn
-	Ngoliba, Mitubiri	109 workers	-	-	-	-
-	Murera, Ruiru	-	-	-	-	-
-	Muteria, Thika	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	8	approx. 821	approx. 7568	-	-	-
<b>.1965.</b>						
1-6.4	Kwega, Makuyu	83 labourers	3,735	KPAWU	G1	RTW after Un agreed to meet employer for negs.
29.5	Two Rivers, Ruiru	60 labourers	300	KPAWU	G3	Reinstatement
1.9	Pema, Ruiru	87 labourers	2,958	KPAWU	G3	Un intervention. RTW as precondition for negs
<b>Totals</b>	3	230	6,993			
<b>.1966.</b>						
6-8.10	Mrefu	26 unskilled	648	-	-	-

Distribution of Strikes by Ward/ Location									
Other	1	Thika	4	Ruiru	4	Makuyu	2	Mitubiri	1

## Appendix 25

Disputes in Other Industries, Kiambu 1964-5 <sup>34</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1964.</b>						
14.1	P & T Comms., Kikuyu	4 skilled and unskilled	48	EAPTWU	J1/G1	Board of inquiry as precondition for RTW
15.1	P & T Comms., Limuru	6 skilled and unskilled	72	EAPTWU	J1/G1	As above
15.1	E.A. Posts & Telecomms	17 skilled and unskilled	136	EAPTWU	J1/G1	As above
25.1	Limuru Posho Mills	8 skilled and unskilled	128	TAWU	G3	LO, Branch secretary, employer discussions.
26.1	Kabete Provision Stores	7 skilled and unskilled	84	TAWU	G3	LO intervention. Workers pay in lieu of notice
27.1	Kiambu Garage	10 skilled and unskilled	320	TAWU	H1	Man agreed to neg with Union on terms and conds
10.4	Mabroukie Tea Estate	150 unskilled & semi-skilled	825		E2	Workers told by KFL their strike was 'unconstit'. RTW on disputed task.
8.5	Mabroukie Tea Estate	69 unskilled & semi-skilled	517.5	estate comm.	E2	Manager refused. RTW
7-8.7	Messrs GD&Bros., Kikuyu	112 skilled and unskilled labour	2,240		A1, C3, C4, overtime, Pub hols, provident scheme, daily to monthly contract	LO intervention. RTW as precondition for negs
7-12.7	Mabroukie Tea Estate	703 skilled & unskilled labour	28,120	KPAWU	E2/J1	RTW as precondition for negs
5.8.	E.A. Bata Shoe Co., Limuru	238 skilled & unskilled labour	119	KSLWU	F3/suspension, G2	RTW as precondition for negs
24-5.9	Corner Bar, Kiambu	4 unskilled	36		G3	LO intervened. RTW
19-23.10	G.D.&Bros.Ltd., Limuru	92 skilled & unskilled sawmillers	3,680	KTFWU	G3	Union instruct RTW
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1,420</b>	<b>36,325.5</b>			
<b>.1965.</b>						
24-6.2	Modern Bar & Restaurant, Limuru	3 waitresses	60	-	A3, G2	Wages inspector to inspect payments in future. RTW
15.3	Kiambu County Council	850 council 'employees'	2,125	KLGWU	A3	RTW after union told them salaries be paid
17-18.3	Tigoni Tea estate, Limuru	130 semi-skilled & unskilled	2,080	KPAWU	G1	LO intervention. Clerk resigned. RTW

<sup>34</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/17/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports 10/1/64 - 30/12/64;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/19/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Volume 3, 4/1/65 - 14/5/66.

29.3-1.4	Standard Bank, Kiambu [also Thika & Fort Hall]	4 workers	128	KDCWU	Demand to be paid back provident fund contributions	Ministry of Lab intervened. Board of Inquiry. RTW.
26.4	Kiambu Store [grocers]	8 skilled & semi-skilled	24	TAWU	C7	LO Intervention. RTW as precondition for negs
27.5	Karirana tea estates, upper Limuru	465 skilled & unskilled	3,720	KPAWU	G2	Manager apologised. RTW
16-17.8	E.A. Posts & Telecomms Admin	22 skilled	352	KUPTE	C7	RTW after Minister of Labour requested workers to abide by staff tribunal.
18-19.8	Macmguist Equator Nursery Flower Farming	47 unskilled	352.5	-	F1 and method of payment. Employer called workers casuals despite paid on monthly basis	LO intervention RTW. Hours of work 7 1/2 hours a day and 5 1/2 on Saturday
11-14.10	Kiambu County Council & Missionary Schools	2,450 teachers	78,400	KNUT	G3, J1, J2. All govt-aided schools under one employer.	Reinstatement. Board of Inquiry.
<b>Totals</b>	9	3,979	87,241.5	-	-	-

<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/Location</i>							
Upper Kiambu	3	Lower Kiambu	6	Kiambu	9	Kamiti	2
Kabete	1	Nairobi	1	Limuru	1		

### Appendix 26

*Stoppages of Work Caused by Industrial Disputes in Kenya, 1965*<sup>35</sup>

<i>Industrial Group</i>	<i>No. of Stoppages</i>	<i>No. of Workers Involved</i>	<i>Man-Days Lost</i>
Agriculture	59	11,814	24,164
Mining and Quarrying	4	140	1,100
Manufacturing	40	22,071	31,912
Building and Construction	13	12,464	69,005
Electricity, Water and Sanitary Services	1	204	102
Commerce	43	6,344	12,268
Transport, Storage and Communications	5	16,125	51,009
Docks	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	8	5,560	145,925
Kenya Government	-	-	-
Local Authority	22	30,880	10,370
East Africa Common Services	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	200	105,602	345,855

<sup>35</sup> P.R.O./ CO/544/110: L.D.A.R. 1965.

## Appendix 27

Disputes in Other Industries, Thika 1965-6<sup>36</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1965.</b>						
14.1	K.E.M.E. Ltd., Thika	38 skilled and semi-skilled	76	KEWU	G3	Union agreed temp suspension of dismissed employee pending further investigations.
18-30.1	K.E.M.E. Ltd.	As above	3,420	KEWU	G3, J5 All workers to reapply for their jobs. They refused	RTW on understanding that case of dismissed worker to be reported to the Min of Lab for inquiry
27.1	United Textile Industries Ltd., Thika	69 factory workers	138	TTWU	Workers supported splinter group in Union. Wanted splinter rep to have discussions with mangmt	Union gensec intervened 40 strikers were designated new employees and 29 who 'engineered' dispute were sacked and replaced by new work seekers.
22.2	K.E.M.E. Ltd.	56 semi-skilled and unskilled	448	KEWU	Fear by workers that company policy of collecting their details to update records was an indirect method of dispensing with their services because of fight between manager and factory employee	Union, KFL advised workers to submit required particulars to company . RTW
26.2	Metal Box [E.A.] Ltd., Thika	500 clerks, chargehands and factory workers	3,000	KEWU	Reinstatement of manager who favoured Africanisation	Union to submit case to indust rels officer to deal with case through proper channels.
5-8.3	E.A.R.H., Thika	204 miscellaneous	4,896	RAU	A1,C8	Union submit demands to Ind Court for ruling. RTW.
8.3	Thika Municipal Council, Thika	395 miscellaneous	3,160	KLGWU	Implementation of Pratt Comm Report	Min of Loc Govt agreed to withdraw its instructs preventing loc auths neg terms and conds with unions. RTW. Union agreed to base its wage demands on the Pratt Report

<sup>36</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/19/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Volume 3, 4/1/65 - 14/5/66;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/78/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1966-7.

25.3	Sisal Ltd., Makuyu	61 labourers	488	KPAWU	E2, implementation of agreement neg between SEA and Union	LO intervention. Company reduced task and agreed to abide by SEA agreement.
29.3-1.4	BANK STRIKE	93 in Thika, Kiambu and Fort Hall		KDCWU		
	Barclays, Thika	15	480	KDCWU	Demanded to be paid back provident fund contributions, 40% salary increase, free medical attention, mat leave, C8	Min of Labour intervened RTW. Issues in dispute referred to Board of inquiry.
	Standard, Thika	27	864	KDCWU	As above	As above
	National & Grindlays Bank, Thika	20	640	KDCWU	As above	As above
30.3-1.4	Nimak pineapple estate	65 labourers	1,560	KPAWU	G1, G2	RTW pending further negs to resolve issue of headman
5-9.4	Metal Box Co. of E.A.	518 skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled	20,720	KEWU	Protested against branch manager going back to UK, demanded removal of factory manager, C8, C7	Terms and conditions to be referred to appropriate machinery. Africanisation referred to Min of Lab
7-8.4	Nimak pineapple estate	65 labourers	1,040	KPAWU	G2	Reinstatement. RTW. Dispute reported to Min of Lab. Appt independent investigator to examine ind rels on estate
2-3.6	Metal Box Co., Thika	397 skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled	4,367	KEWU	A1	Union gensec accepted conciliation. RTW
10-11.6	Nath Brothers Ltd., Thika	305 machinists, & unskilled labour	3,050	TTWU	E2	RTW. Issues referred to joint neg comm.
11.8	Nath Bros Ltd	350	2,800	TTWU	E2	RTW. Report made to Perm Sec Min of Lab to appoint ind investigator into strike/recs based on his findings
16-17.8	E.A. Posts and Telecomms., Thika	50 miscellaneous	800	KUPTE	Demand employers implement recs of Saidi tribunal	RTW. Min of Lab requested parties to abide by decisions of staff tribunal as defined in recognition agreement
18-19.10	United Textile Industries, Thika	394 factory workers	6,304	TTWU	Delay on work of comm appt to deal with job classification and evaluation; removal of ind rels officer	Union reported dispute to Min of Lab who appointed ind investigator. Comm to submit report to workers

11-14.10	Municipal Muslim Primary School	1	21	KNUT	G3, one employer for all teachers, C2, C4, mat leave, A1	Board of inquiry
11-14.10	Township Primary School, Thika	4	84	KNUT	As above	As above
11-14.10	Queen of the Rosary School,	6	126	KNUT	As above	As above
11-14.10	St. Patrick's School	12	252	KNUT	As above	As above
21-23.10	United Textile Industries Ltd., Thika	407 factory workers	23,199	TTWU	Failure of directors of company to hold meeting to discuss workers demands of 18-19.10	Investigator appointed to look into causes and circumstances of strike and general labour relations within factory
22-30.10	Nath Brothers Ltd., Thika	380 factory workers	22,040	TTWU	G3	RTW. Company withdrew letter regarding refusal to reinstate. Case to be discussed at future meeting at chaired by IRO Min of Lab
3.11	Metal Box Co. [E.A.] Ltd., Thika	550 skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled	550	KEWU	Protest against number of warnings given to workers	RTW. As a precondition of meeting to discuss warnings.
<b>Totals</b>	26	4,927	104,523			
<b>.1966.</b>						
1-3.11	Thika Municipal Council	37 teachers	888	KNUT	Old dispute between Union and Min of Ed. for unified terms and conditions of service for teachers	RTW. Dispute referred to Ind Court for ruling as to whether decision by Min of Lab to ban the strike was legal
30.11	Balfour Beatty contractors, Thika	50 casuals	100	-	F1, A1, G2, A5, lunchbreak	RTW. Complaint invest by lab off/all complaints settled following day.
<b>Totals</b>	2	87	988			

***Distribution of Strikes by Ward / Location***

Thika	22	Makuyu	1	Other	5
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## Appendix 28

Disputes in Other Industries, Kiambu 1966-8 <sup>37</sup>

Dates	Workplace / Division	Number, type and gender of workers involved	Man Hours Lost	Union	Causes [prioritised]	Resolution
<b>.1966.</b>						
4-6.5	Uplands Bacon Factory	206 general factory labourers	4,017	-	Job grading, removal of production manager, C8, C6.	Strike declared illegal
18-21.5	Limuru Tea Company	298 field labourers	8,940	KPAWU	E2	Increased task to be done on overtime basis. Union recognised employer's right to increase tasks provided workers informed in advance
19-21.5	Farlyndum tea estate, Limuru	55 field labourers	1,210	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Gwalia tea estate, Limuru	180 field labourers	3,960	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Harringer tea estate	43 field labourers	946	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Malinduku tea estate, Limuru	15 field labourers	330	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Tigoni tea estate, Limuru	159 pickers and pruners	4,770	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Mr Fowler/tea estate, Limuru	164 field labourers	3,608	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Karirana tea estate	550 field and factory labourers	12,100	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
19-21.5	Mabroukie tea estate	665 field and factory labourers	14,630	KPAWU	J1, as above	as above
28.6	Kacharoba tea estate	41 unskilled	328	KPAWU	G2	Manager warned to respect and treat workers kindly
9.9	Karirana tea estate, Limuru	300 general labourers	1,880	KPAWU	Removal of clerk in charge of weighing machine	RTW. Clerk transferred to another section pending invest
22-23.9	Karirana tea estate	45 skilled and unskilled	585	KPAWU	Protested against mangmts order to report on duty in shifts -7am -9.30am They wanted to report in one group as before	Union told workers that managmt order was lawful and should be obeyed. RTW.

<sup>37</sup> K.N.A./ABK/ 8/19/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports / Volume 3, 4/1/65 - 14/5/66;  
K.N.A./ABK/ 8/78/ L.D. 98 Strike Reports, 1966-7.

24-9.9	Karirana tea estate	500 skilled and unskilled	18,500	KPAWU	G3	RTW. Independent investigator from Ministry to look into discharge
8.10.	Highgate Farm [flowers]	8 unskilled	40	KPAWU	F1	Work to start at 7am and finish at 3pm
1-3.11	Kiambu County Council	2,500 teachers	60,000	KNUT	Union wanted Waruhiu Report made known to them and to know whether report had made rec of one employer for all teachers	RTW as a condition of their leaders being released from custody
5-7.11	Ithangi tea estate, Limuru	47 unskilled factory labour	611	KPAWU	C1,C2	RTW on condition that LO discuss improvements with manager
15-16.11	Glenbracken Nurseries Ltd.	63 skilled and unskilled	819	-	G3	Dismissal notice withdrawn. RTW
<b>Total</b>	18	5,839	137,274			

.1967.

1-4.2	Kalimoni sisal estate, Juja	90 unskilled	2,700	KPAWU	Change of sisal cutting tasks, from bundles to 'juti' system	RTW on old syst, pending negs on changes.
11-17.5	Limuru Tea Co.	290 general labour	10,730	KPAWU	G3,G1	Uncondit RTW after strikers instructed by Union
23.5-7.6	Limuru Tea Co.	290 general labour	41,220	KPAWU	G3	RTW after Minister of Labour declared strike unlawful and Un officials intervened.
24-26.10	Farlyndum tea estate, Limuru	91 general labour	1,638	KPAWU	G3	Cash in lieu of Notice. Union instruct RTW
<b>Totals</b>	4	761	56,288			

.1968.

4-8.1	Tigoni Tea estate, Limuru	112 general labourers	1,792	KPAWU	Mangmt refusal to provide labour with transport to hospital	RTW pending meeting between KTGA and Union
22-4.1	Tinganga tea estate	117 general labourers	2,106	KPAWU	E2,G2	RTW. Bransec then submitted grievances for consideration
14.2	Tinganga tea estate	65 general labourers	512	KPAWU	E2	RTW as precondition of discussing grievances
17-8.4	Kabuku tea estate, Tigoni	28 unskilled	336	-	A1, -/50cts rise on 2/- a day	Employer agreed -/25 cts a day
<b>Totals</b>	4	322	4,746			



<i>Distribution of Strikes by Ward/ Location</i>							
Upper Kiambu	3	Lower Kiambu	6	Kiambu	8	Kamiti	2
Kabete	1	Nairobi	1	Limuru	1		

### Appendix 29

*Comparative summary of strikes by district including number of man hours lost, 1959-68.*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Economic Sector</i>	<i>Number of Strikes</i>	<i>Number of Strikers</i>	<i>Hours Lost</i>
.1959.	Thika	Coffee	11	307	1,107
		Other	21	462	11,294
		Totals:	8	769	12,401
	Kiambu	Coffee	-	-	-
		Other	1	40	80
		Totals:	-	-	-
.1960.	Thika	Coffee	32	5,682	360,001
		Other	20	8,704	720,804.5
		Totals:	52	14,386	1,080,805.5
	Kiambu	Coffee	29	2,347	25,216
		Other	7	2,498	233,862
		Totals:	36	4,845	259,078
.1961.	Thika	Coffee	3	470	6,920
		Other	9	1,918	168,628
		Totals:	12	2,388	175,548
	Kiambu	Coffee	19	1,725	53,273.5
		Other	5	1,799	138,555
		Totals:	24	3,524	191,128.5
.1962.	Thika	Coffee	24+General Strike	30,616	987,202
		Other	20	3,914	203,577
		Totals:	43+General Strike	34,580	1,190,779
	Kiambu	Coffee	218 including General Strike	17,071	550,677
		Other	9	3,830	51,399
		Totals:	228	20,901	602,076
.1963.	Thika	Coffee	29	3,983	158,056
		Other	20	3,679	166,751
		Totals:	49	7,662	324,807
	Kiambu	Coffee	13	1,347	33,154
		Other	2	359	13,320
		Totals:	15	1,706	46,474

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Economic Sector</i>	<i>Number of Strikes</i>	<i>Number of Strikers</i>	<i>Hours Lost</i>
.1964.	Thika	Coffee	8	821	7,568
		Other	14	2,122	31,368.75
		Totals:	22	2,943	38,936.5
	Kiambu	Coffee	4	104	514
		Other	13	1,420	36,325.5
		Totals:	17	1,524	36,839.5
.1965.	Thika	Coffee	3	230	6,993
		Other	29	4,958	105,515
		Totals:	32	5,188	112,508
	Kiambu	Coffee	5	1,071	13,319
		Other	8	3,975	87,113.5
		Totals:	13	5,046	100,432.5
.1966.	Thika	Coffee	1	26	648
		Other	2	87	988
		Totals:	3	113	1,636
	Kiambu	Coffee	5	917	26,485
		Other	18	5,839	137,274
		Totals:	23	6,756	163,759
.1967.	Thika	Coffee	-	-	-
		Other	-	-	-
		Totals:	-	-	-
	Kiambu	Coffee	-	-	-
		Other	4	761	56,288
		Totals:	-	-	-
.1968.	Thika	Coffee	-	-	-
		Other	-	-	-
		Totals:	-	-	-
	Kiambu	Coffee	-	-	-
		Other	-	-	-
		Totals:	4	322	4,746

## Appendix 30

*Distribution and analysis of strikes by industry, including number of strikers and man hours lost, 1959-68.*

Year	Area	Economic Sector	Number of Strikes	Number of Strikers	Hours Lost
.1959.	Thika	Coffee	11	307	1,107
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	8	180	450
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	12	282	10,844
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		31	769	12,401
	Kiambu	Coffee	-	-	-
		Tea	3	-	-
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	1	40	80
		Industry	1	-	-
		Public Service	1	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		6	40	80
.1960.	Thika	Coffee	32	5,682	360,001
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	9	4,161	417,059
		Pineapples	1	60	1,440
		Gen. Ag.	3	58	696
		Industry	5	4,377	301,282
		Public Service	1	40	320
		Service Industries	1	8	64
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		52	14,378	1,080,862
	Kiambu	Coffee	29	2,347	25,216
		Tea	1	2,090	222,760
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	2	94	6,642
		Industry	4	314	4,460
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		29	4,845	259,078

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Economic Sector</i>	<i>Number of Strikes</i>	<i>Number of Strikers</i>	<i>Hours Lost</i>
.1961.	Thika	Coffee	3	470	6,920
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	2	930	34,820
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	1	6	42
		Industry	0	982	25,766
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		12	2,388	67,548
	Kiambu	Coffee	19	1,725	53,273.5
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	2	1,753	138,205
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	2	33	246
		Distrib.	1	13	104
	Totals:		24	3,524	191,828.5
.1962.	Thika	Coffee	24	30,616	987,202
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	7	1,479	39,040
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	1	400	2,400
		Industry	5	1,330	107,300
		Public Service	3	516	51,217
		Service Industries	2	49	952
		Distrib.	-	-	-
		Others	2	140	2,668
	Totals:		44+ General Strike	34,580	1,190,779
	Kiambu	Coffee	218	17,071	550,677
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	1	82	1,148
		Industry	3	2,294	27,364
		Public Service	3	1,429	22,682
		Service Industries	2	25	205
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		227	20,901	602,076

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Economic Sector</i>	<i>Number of Strikes</i>	<i>Number of Strikers</i>	<i>Hours Lost</i>
.1963.	Thika	Coffee	29	3,983	158,056
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	7	2,468	133,324
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	6	686	20,103
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	2	39	312
		Distrib.	-	-	-
		Other	5	485	13,012
	Totals:		49	7,662	324,807
	Kiambu	Coffee	13	1,347	33,154
		Tea	1	350	12,600
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	-	-	-
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	1	9	720
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		15	1,706	46,474
.1964.	Thika	Coffee	8	821	7,568
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	2	1,096	17,536
		Pineapples	2	113	693
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	3	584	2,669.5
		Public Service	2	90	801.25
		Service Industries	5	239	9,669
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		22	2,943	38,936.75
	Kiambu	Coffee	4	104	514
		Tea	3	922	29,462.5
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	4	450	6,167
		Public Service	1	17	136
		Service Industries	5	31	560
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		17	1,524	36,839.5

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Economic Sector</i>	<i>Number of Strikes</i>	<i>Number of Strikers</i>	<i>Hours Lost</i>
.1965.	Thika	Coffee	3	230	6,993
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	1	61	488
		Pineapples	2	130	2,600
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	13	4,002	90,112
		Public Service	7	672	9,339
		Service Industries	6	93	2,976
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		32	5,188	112,508
	Kiambu	Coffee	5	1,071	13,319
		Tea	2	595	5,800
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	1	47	352.5
		Industry	-	-	-
		Public Service	3	3,322	80,877
		Service Industries	2	11	84
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		13	5,046	100,432.5
.1966.	Thika	Coffee	1	26	648
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	1	50	100
		Public Service	1	37	888
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		3	113	1,636
	Kiambu	Coffee	5	917	26,485
		Tea	14	3,062	72,398
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	2	71	859
		Industry	1	206	4,017
		Public Service	1	2,500	60,000
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
	Totals:		23	6,756	163,759

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Economic Sector</i>	<i>Number of Strikes</i>	<i>Number of Strikers</i>	<i>Hours Lost</i>
.1967.	Thika	Coffee	-	-	-
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	-	-	-
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
		Totals:	-	-	-
	Kiambu	Coffee	-	-	-
		Tea	3	671	53,588
		Sisal	1	90	2,700
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	-	-	-
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
		Totals:	4	761	56,288
.1968.	Thika	Coffee	-	-	-
		Tea	-	-	-
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	-	-	-
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
		Totals:	-	-	-
	Kiambu	Coffee	-	-	-
		Tea	4	322	4,746
		Sisal	-	-	-
		Pineapples	-	-	-
		Gen. Ag.	-	-	-
		Industry	-	-	-
		Public Service	-	-	-
		Service Industries	-	-	-
		Distrib.	-	-	-
		Totals:	4	322	4,746

## Appendix 31

*The Coffee Industry in Central Province, giving details of numbers and average size of estates, acreages and locations as at July 1960.*<sup>38</sup>

<i>Ward</i>	<i>Acreage of Coffee</i>	<i>Number of Estates</i>	<i>Average size of estate</i>
Thika	10,283	58	177.3
Ruiru	11,106	49	226.7
Mitubiri	2,720	20	136
Makuyu	3,022	25	121
Donyo Sabuk	2,371	8	296
Upper Kiambu	3,973	22	181
Kiambu	11,481	101	114
Kabete	2,076	87	24
Limuru	473	12	39.5
Nyeri	2,253	34	66
<b>Summaries:</b>			
Thika District	29,502	160	184
Kiambu District	18,003	222	81
Nyeri District	2,253	34	66
<b>Totals:</b>	49,758	476	104.5

<sup>38</sup> C.B.K. Kenya Coffee Monthly Bulletin, July 1960.



## Appendix 32

*K.C.G.A. Member Estates, giving details of numbers and average size of estates, acreages and locations as at December 31st, 1960.*

<i>Ward</i>	<i>Acreage of Coffee</i>	<i>Number of Estates</i>	<i>Average size of estate</i>
Thika	10,239	50	205
Ruiru	9,724	39	249
Mitubiri	3,212	17	189
Makuyu	1,837	12	153
Donyo Sabuk	1,907	5	381
Upper Kiambu	3,733.5	15	249
Kiambu	10,253.5	75	137
Kabete	1,096	25	44
Limuru	333	4	83
Nyeri	1,973	21	94
Machakos	3.5	1	3.5
<b>Summaries:</b>			
Thika District	26,919	123	219
Kiambu District	15,416	119	130
Nyeri District	1,973	21	94
Machakos District	3.5	1	3.5
<b>Totals:</b>	44,311.5 <sup>39</sup>	264 <sup>40</sup>	168

<sup>39</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20: Arbitrator [Jimmy Verjee] Report, 'In the matter of an Arbitration of a Trade Dispute between the S.C.P.W.U. and the K.C.G.A.', November 1962. By November 1962, this total acreage had fallen to 43,394, though the number of members had risen slightly to 273 with an average acreage of 160 acres. There were just eight estates in the K.C.G.A. membership with an acreage of over 500 acres.

<sup>40</sup> K.N.A./AMC/7/20: Verjee Report. By the time of the tribunal began its proceedings in November, 1962, this figure had risen to 273 coffee producers east of the Rift Valley representing 31.3% of Kenya's total coffee acreage. The K.C.G.A.'s members employed between 25,000 and 30,000 workers. The total number of permanent workers in the industry at the time was, according to the tribunal, estimated at 70,000. This was in addition to the casual labour during the flush picking period.

## Appendix 33

*Anatomy of the Coffee Industry in Thika district giving details of ownership and acreages of estates, tribal and gender composition of the Workforce as at August 1st, 1960.*

Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
THIKA			K.E.M	Kipsigs	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
KIRIGA	Archer & Barnley	280	160		5								79	78	9	166
GRANVILLE	de Grevenkip-Castenskiold, H.	115	79					1				12	41	51		92
BENDOR	Bendor Plantations Ltd.	300	166	1	6		36					2	109	82	20	211
SWAHARA	Davlock Coffee Estates Ltd.	160	89		4			2					59	28	8	95
SAMURU	Alva Ltd.	400	425				1	1				1	133	261	34	428
WANGO	Brochner, Mrs O.	325	172				3					3	78	93	7	178
MUTERIA	Brown, W.R.	160	132		6			4					49	71	23	142
CHANIA BRIDGE	East African Estates Ltd.	272	240		3		6	5			4	1	104	102	53	259
CHANIA RIVER	Chania River Estates Ltd.	258	182		1		5	5			1	1	95	90	8	195
MUNYARA	Codran, J.M.C.	107	8		6								8	6		14
HOLY FAMILY CONVENT	The White Sisters	240	176					4				1	63	117	1	181
KOORALI	Coverdale, R.	275	163		3			1				1	69	75	29	173
KITIMAI	Ophir Ltd.	180	110		15			2					79	45	1	125
KALAMU	Kalanu Estate Ltd.	185														
MUTHURI	Crudge, D.M.	186	99					12					59	30	22	111
KISIWA	Weir, Mrs M.R.	65														
GETHUMBWINI	Gethumbwini Ltd.	300	228		15							3	75	170	1	246
COMO	Frost, Major R.K.	60	81										41	38	2	81
MACHULE	Como Coffee Co.	225	203	1			7	4					108	65	42	215

Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
			K.E.M	Kipsigis	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
MAKWA	Gumoes, Mrs R.	136	114										34	74	6	
CHANIA	Harries, A.I.R. & Son Ltd.	235	176					5	10			16	100	98	7	205
KYHURIA	Bobs Harries Ltd.	174	461					44	24			3	220	245	67	532
KARAMAINI	Bobs Harries Ltd.	180	Inclusive													
CRANHURST	Cranhurst Estate	135	89										56	21	12	89
EAAGADS	Eagads Ltd.	300	213	1								1	87	115	13	215
BENVAR	Karimani Ltd.	200	258					10					96	101	71	268
KIAMA	Nareca Ltd.	300	178		16								62	132		194
MANGU	West & Dickenson	170	188	2				5					75	80	40	195
KARAMENU POINT	Knott, H.B.	50	49										23	21	5	49
KANYERI	Kanyeri Ltd.	100	137										60	77		137
MREFU	Murera Estate Ltd.	80	116	12				33				4	97	48	20	165
MONYAKA	Lupa Ltd.	240	221					1					63	135	24	222
SHORTLANDS	Shortlands Ltd.	146	40					52			1		78	10	5	93
KIGANDA	McCreath & Dodds Ltd.	140	119										51	49	19	119
MAHOTI	Dodds, W.H. & J.M.	135	146	7			3	3				2	84	70	7	161
KISEMA	Moir, J.T.S.	140	155										116	34	5	155
MAKINDI RIVER	Makindi River Estate Ltd.	110	49										29	12	8	49

[illegible]

Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
			K.E.M	Kipsigis	Maungoti	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Sonali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
COLORADA	Hellenic Enterprises Ltd.	45	36										15	20	1	36
JUMA PILI	McInerny, G.C.	25	51							2					28	53
KAMAKUTI	Grue, Mrs J.M.	2	14							2					4	16
KERETI	Keret Estate		137												77	137
CLYDE	Massaro, G. & M.		40							2					24	42
KIHOTO	Kihoto Farm		169							1					72	170
KARANGAITA	Karangaita Estate		139		23			3	6				23	1	42	195

Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce														
			K.E.M	Kipsigis	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL	
<b>RUIRU</b>																	
SPRINGFIELD	Aubrey, A.E.	190															
KALIMONI	B.E.A. Planting Co. Ltd.	80	126					1	22	8				88	50	19	157
GLENLEE	Hayes, M.E. de L	115	85						4					48	32	9	89
THETA FARM	Theta Coffee Estate Ltd.	200	132			2		1	8					48	85	10	143
RIVERSIDE	Akerhielm, Baron U.	170	125											70	47	8	125
KITAMAIYU	Kitamaiyu Estate Ltd.	226	248			9		3	40					119	143	38	300
MACOOTHIA	Macoothia Estate Ltd.	200															
TYN-Y-BRYN	Williams, J.M.	53	84						1					53	25	7	85
SURREY FARM	Mayne T.	70	74			2			8					40	44		84
KAREMU	Karimu Ltd.	240															
KOMINA	Foster, M. and E.	84	58			3			16					36	31	8	75
JACARANDA	Agricultural Department	100	237					1	12	17			1	144	105	20	269
NGEWE	Socfinaf Co. Ltd.	300	203			8			8			2	1	119	96	7	222
THE RIDGE	Glassford, G. J.	300	187					9	11				23	148	82		230
MARAMBU	Mayers, R.J.E.	120															
MASEGA	Gregory, T.N.	120	84						2				2	64	14	10	88
MFEFU FARM	Mrefu Farm	40															
OTTERHEAD	Ross, Mrs D. / Otterhead Ltd.	100	94						2				16	47	64	1	112

[illegible]

[illegible]



Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
			K.F.M	Kipsigis	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
TASSIA	Tassia Estate		72		3			4				3	50	29	3	82
KABEA	Kabea Estate Ltd.		142					2				21	60	105		165
BOVEROS	Boveros Ltd.		42					1					27	13	3	43
	Crops Ltd.		78	4									55	17	10	82
KARUGU	Karugu Estate		16					1					5	12		17
THERIKA	Therika Estate		76	1	2			8	15			3	91	52		143



Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
			K.E.M	Kipsigat	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
SWANI	Mitubiri Coffee Co.	60	95					30	1				68	58		126
KARENGELELE FARM	Worth, M.		5		2			16				7	21	2	5	28
MAGUTHWANI	Francescon, G. & V.	30	52					148					40	52	108	200
	Kemorori Estate Ltd.		150								1		48	36	67	151
	Chui Estate		29					10	19			9	19	42	6	67

[illegible]

Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce														
			K.E.M	Kipsigis	Maragoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisi	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL	
ODENSVI	Rundgren, T.	60	40						10					37	13		50
NDERA	Powell, Dr. G.M.C. & Mrs M.	80	43						33				1	47	22	8	77
MAKUYU COFFEE PLANTATION	Hunter, G. /Sisal Ltd.	120	220						36					125	120	11	256
KARATINA	Athara Ltd.	70	61						46			1		66	42		108
RIALTO	Cholacoglou, T.	40	26						26					35	9	8	52
KILIMAKOGI	Link, C.W. & Barker, Mrs M.	16	9						44					43	4	6	53
KUYU	Kuyu Coffee Estates Ltd.		161						15					146	30		176
TANA RANCH	Ithanga Ltd.		54	1	8				108	1				120 + 1	39	12	172
KAMBITI			4						39					26	17		43
TWO RIVERS	Two Rivers Farm		27											22	4	1	27
RUA NGONDE	Rua Ngonde Estate		20											20			20
MARATENA	Maratena Farm		5											5			5
MASYANA	Masyana farm		8											8			8

Name of Estate	Ownership	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
			K.E.M	Kipsigis	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
DONYO SABUK																
KIBOKO FARM	Anstee, R.S.	68	67					67				67	153	48		201
LA FINCHA	Dixon, A.T.S.	148														
MATUU	Matuu Estate Ltd. / Clay	430	2					296				4	260		42	302
KAYATA	Kayata Plantations Ltd.	225			7		3	195				48	186	1	64	251
KIANZABE	Kianzabe Estate Ltd.	484	80		37			348				43	316	99	93	508
DONYO SABUK	McMillan Estates Ltd.	120						146					104	32	10	146
MATUNGULU	Weldon, F.D.H.	400	58				11	155					119	98	7	224
MELLERSTANE	Edmunds, D.L.	120	87					18				5	96	12	2	110
MAGOGONI	Edmunds, D.L.	115														
GATUA NYAGA	Gataua Nyaga Estate		58					47	2				56	47	4	107

Total Number of Estates	Acreage	Tribal and Gender Composition of the Workforce													
		K.E.M	Kipsigis	Margoli	Masai	Luo	Kamba	Luyha	Somali	Kisii	Others	Men	Women	Children	TOTAL
		19,514	31	418	12	301	3,457	57	9	51	546	12,559	10,173	1,772	24,512

41. 'K.N.A./AMC/7/11/Coffee Planters Association: acreages of coffee estates registered by Thika Labour Office, as at 1 September, 1954.  
K.N.A./AMC/7/11 and K.N.A./ABK/3/30/Kenya Coffee Growers Association: statistics relating to the tribal and gender composition of the workforce compiled from Labour Office returns of African workers employed on coffee estates in Thika district as at August 1st, 1960.

## Appendix 34

*Quantities and Values of the Coffee Commodity Relative to Values of Total Exported Agricultural Produce during 1939 and the years 1943-65.*

	.1939. <sup>41</sup>	.1943. <sup>42</sup>	.1944. <sup>43</sup>	.1945. <sup>44</sup>	.1946. <sup>45</sup>	.1947. <sup>46</sup>
Quantity	338,125cwt	156,762cwt	149,667cwt	149,297cwt	193,342cwt	213,814cwt
Value	£800,827	£562,651	£528,844	£639,433	£950,179	£1,311,633
Total	£3,228,282	£3,220,828	£3,883,397	£4,720,215	£5,622,128	£7,589,578
	.1948. <sup>47</sup>	.1949. <sup>48</sup>	.1950. <sup>49</sup>	.1951. <sup>50</sup>	.1952. <sup>51</sup>	.1953. <sup>52</sup>
Quantity	287,644cwt	156,300cwt	204,804cwt	198,759cwt	338,441cwt	295,795cwt
Value	£2,018,573	£1,509,836	£3,549,406	£4,096,317	£7,123,360	£6,712,733
Total	£8,783,398	£9,635,894	£14,750,178	£20,721,491	£22,752,477	£16,718,264
	.1954. <sup>53</sup>	.1955. <sup>54</sup>	.1956. <sup>55</sup>	.1957. <sup>56</sup>	.1958. <sup>57</sup>	.1959. <sup>58</sup>
Quantity	216,126cwt	388,469cwt	534,214cwt	445,677cwt	500,536cwt	517,545cwt
Value	£5,726,824	£8,926,908	£13,674,568	£10,812,281	£10,422,722	£10,593,790
Total	£17,823,241	£23,554,708	£26,178,121	£23,446,278	£26,418,528	£29,778,773
	.1960. <sup>59</sup>	.1961. <sup>60</sup>	.1962. <sup>61</sup>	.1963. <sup>62</sup>	.1964. <sup>63</sup>	.1965. <sup>64</sup>
Quantity	556,476cwt	643,761cwt	610,290cwt	736,205cwt	833,711cwt	756,894cwt
Value	£10,277,852	£10,624,891	£10,612,670	£11,131,428	£15,411,167	£14,111,099
Total	£31,394,552	£30,825,255	£33,731,001	£39,133,073	£40,022,170	£36,478,965

\*Quantities in *CWT*.

Values in £.

<sup>42</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

<sup>43</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

<sup>44</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

<sup>45</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

<sup>46</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

<sup>47</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

<sup>48</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/64/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1948.

<sup>49</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/65/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1949.

<sup>50</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/66/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1950.

<sup>51</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/74/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1951.

<sup>52</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/76/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1952.

<sup>53</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/78/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1953.

<sup>54</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/80/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1954.

<sup>55</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/82/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1955.

<sup>56</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/89/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1956.

<sup>57</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/91/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1957.

<sup>58</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/93/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1958.

<sup>59</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/95/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1959.

<sup>60</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/97/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1960.

<sup>61</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/100/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1961.

<sup>62</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/103/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1962.

<sup>63</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/105/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1963.

<sup>64</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/107/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1964.

<sup>65</sup> P.R.O./C O/544/109/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1965.

## Appendix 35

*Quantities and Values of Coffee Marketed by African Farmers, 1947-65.*

.1947.65							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Totals		
Quantity/ Parchment & Mbuni	767 cwt		261 cwt		1,028 cwt		
Value	.£3,701		.£1,765		.£5,466.		
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £1,514, 398							
.1948.66							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Totals		
Quantity/ Parchmen t & Mbuni	509 cwt		1,311 cwt		1,820 cwt		
Value	.£2,596		.£4,121		.£6,717		
.1949.67							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Totals		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
Parchment	378 cwt	£2,595	483 cwt	.£4,952			
Buni	81 cwt		264 cwt	.£1,269			
Totals	459 cwt	.£2,595	474 cwt	.£6,221	1,206 cwt	.£8,816	
.1950.68							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Totals		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
Parchment	295 cwt	.£2,587	834 cwt	.£14,973			
Buni	43 cwt		1,176 cwt	.£5,924			
Totals	338 cwt	.£2,587	2,010 cwt	.£20,897	2,348 cwt	.£23,484	
.1951. No figures.							
.1952.69							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Totals		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
Parchment	530 cwt	£6,982	1,229 cwt	£40,020			
Buni	254 cwt		1,588 cwt				
Totals	784 cwt	.£6,982	2,817 cwt	.£3,601	3,601 cwt	.£10,583	
.1953.70							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Totals		
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	
Parchment		£18,611	202 tons	.£91,710			
Buni			224 tons	.£6,632			
Totals		.£18,611	426 tons	.£98,342		.£116,953	
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £3,533,446							
.1954.71							
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Coast Province		Totals
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity Value
Parchment	103 tons	.£35,680	349 tons	.£176,841	4 tons	.£1,400	
Buni			360 tons	.£78,022			
Totals	103 tons	.£35,680	709 tons	.£254,863	4 tons	.£1,400	816 .£309,777
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £5,380,745							



<b>.1955.72</b>								
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Coast Province		Totals	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Parchment	90 tons	£36,577	916 tons	£257,621	6 tons	£1,800		
Buni	117 tons	£13,179			4 tons	£600		
Totals	207 tons	£49,756	916 tons	£257,621	10 tons	£2,400	1,133 tons	£309,777
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £4,986,332								
<b>.1956.73</b>								
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Coast Province		Totals	
Quantity/ Parchment & Buni	344 tons		2,457 tons		10 tons		2,811 tons	
Value	£130,560		£353,965		£600		£485,125	
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £4,613,680								
<b>.1957.74</b>								
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Coast Province		Totals	
Quantity/ Parchment & Buni	646 tons		3,097 tons		21 tons		3764 tons	
Value	£198,427		£679,239		£6,488		£10,578	
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £5,216, 215								
<b>.1958.75</b>								
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Coast Province		Totals	
Quantity/ Parchment & Buni	1,090 tons		2,505 tons		26 tons		3,647 tons	
Value	£218,174		£1,007,484		£7,178		£33,220	
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £1,266, 956								
<b>.1959.76</b>								
	Nyanza Province		Central Province		Coast Province		Totals	
Quantity/ Parchment & Buni	1,532.5 tons		4,287 tons		55 tons		5,993 tons	
Value	£341,026		£1,789,964		£13,580		£43,515	
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £2,188,085								
<b>.1960.77</b>								
	Nyanza Province	Rift Valley Province	Central Province	Southern Province	Coast Province	Totals		
Quantity/ Parchment & Buni	1,820 tons	3 tons	4,871 tons	198 tons	69 tons	6,961 tons		
Value	£479,314	£300	£1,855,194	£58,803	£15,150	£2,408,761		
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £16,531,938								
<b>.1961.78</b>								
	Nyanza Province	Rift Valley Province	Central Province	Southern Province	Coast Province	Totals		
Quantity/ Parchment & Buni	1,870 tons + 20 tons [Robusta]	2 tons	6,064 tons	148 tons	101 tons	8,185 tons		
Value	£381,036 + £1,000	£524	£2,208,927	£41,636	£19,783	£2,651,906		
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £18,725,222								

.1962.79						
	Nyanza Province	Rift Valley Province	Central Province	Southern Province	Coast Province	Totals
Quantity / Clean & Mbuni	2,389 tons	11 tons	7,713 tons	315 tons	100 tons	10,528 tons
Value	£404,644	£2,430	2,482,365	£101,418	£21,379	£3,012,236
Total Value of Products Marketed from African Areas: £13,671,982						

.1963.80							
	Western Region	Nyanza Region	Rift Valley Region	Central Region	Eastern Region	Coast Region	Totals
Quantity/ Clean & Mbuni	891 tons	1,806 tons	30 tons	4,485 tons	4,707 tons	100 tons	12,019 tons
Value	£177,860	£308,273	£7,550	£1,256,028	£1,477,034	£25,945	£3,252,690

.1964.81							
	Western Province	Nyanza Province	Rift Valley Province	Central Province	Eastern Province	Coast Province	Totals
Quantity/ Clean & Mbuni	745 tons	1,951 tons	41 tons	5,847 tons	6,798 tons	124 tons	15,506 tons
Value	£161,5655	£419,412	£10,250	£1,856,343	£2,297,043	£40,950	£4,785,563

.1965.82							
	Western Province	Nyanza Province	Rift Valley Province	Central Province	Eastern Province	Coast Province	Totals
Quantity/ Clean & Mbuni	429 tons	2,214.3 tons	41 tons	6,450 tons	6,567 tons	95 tons	15,796.3 tons
Value	£79,548	£488,626	£10,300	£2,155,3022	£1,954,600	£31,122	£4,719,498

- 66 P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.  
67 P.R.O./C O/544/64/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1948.  
68 P.R.O./C O/544/65/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1949.  
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81 P.R.O./C O/544/105/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1963.  
82 P.R.O./C O/544/107/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1964.  
83 P.R.O./C O/544/109/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1965.

## Appendix 36

*Acreages, Yields and Remuneration of African and European Coffee Production, 1946-65* <sup>83</sup>

Year/ Season	Number of Licensed African growers	Total Planted Acreage in the African Areas	Number of Co-op Societies	Registered European Acreage under Coffee.	Average Pay out to All Growers	Average Yield per Acre
.1946. <sup>84</sup> 1946-7	867 [Central Province]	241 [Central Province]	-	64,392	sh.111/68 cwt	-
.1947. <sup>85</sup> 1947-8	1,222 [Central Province]	342 [Central Province]	-	64,261	sh.148/77 cwt	-
.1948. <sup>86</sup> 1948-9	2,236 [Central Province]	532/Central Province & 220/ S.Nyanza	-	60,000	sh.161/25 cwt	2.23 cwt
.1949. <sup>87</sup> 1949-50	5,231	1,374	-	59,724	sh.350/- cwt	2.1 cwt
.1950. <sup>88</sup> 1950-1	-	-	-	-	-	2.1 cwt
.1951. <sup>89</sup> 1951-2	8,208	1,735	-	-	-	3.25 cwt
.1952. <sup>90</sup> 1952-3	11,864	3,038	-	60,500	£421 ton	5.3 cwt
.1953. <sup>91</sup> 1953-4	15,019	3,867	-	60,700	£453 ton	4 cwt
.1954. <sup>92</sup> 1954-5	18,806	5,339	-	59,564	£517 ton	3.7 cwt
.1955. <sup>93</sup> 1955-6	24,486	7,511	-	59,670	£379 ton	4.1 cwt
.1956. <sup>94</sup> 1956-7	-	-	-	60,000	£528 ton	-
.1957. <sup>95</sup> 1957-8	57,000	17,000	57	62,000	£444 ton	-
.1958. <sup>96</sup> 1958-9	75,482	20,301	98	67,000	£402 ton	-
.1959. <sup>97</sup> 1959-60	89,153	26,161	114	69,567	£419 ton	-
.1960. <sup>98</sup> 1960-1	106,300	33,137	125	69,970	£330 ton	7.12 cwt
.1961. <sup>99</sup> 1961-2	141,984	44,327	128	-	-	-
.1962. <sup>100</sup> 1962-3	149,399	69,780	139	-	-	-
.1963. <sup>101</sup> 1963-4	192,844	115,117.94	146	-	-	-
.1964. <sup>102</sup> 1964-5	236,660	125,876	156	-	£314 ton	-
.1965. <sup>103</sup> 1965-6	234,848	130,095	157	-	-	-

<sup>84</sup> [i] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Kenya*, pp.345 and 361. The figures given for the tonnages of African and European coffee production for 1955-63 are all at variance with those cited in the Department of Agriculture reports for the same period.

[ii] D.A.Low and Alison Smith [eds.], *History of East Africa*, Volume III, p.591. Their figures for the value of European coffee production are in fact, according to the Department of Agriculture reports for 1955-61, the combined value of European and African coffee production.

[iii] P. Moseley, *The Settler Economies*, p.174. Moseley's account gives an average annual acreage of European coffee production of 64,000 acres for the years 1955-60. The Department of Agriculture's figures give an average of 65,707 acres for the same period.

[iv] K.N.A./AMC 7/20/Verjee Report. The report gives a figure for African farmers of 50,000 planted acres producing 8,070 tons of coffee during 1961-2. The Department of Agriculture gives figures of 44,327 acres and 8,185 tons respectively.

[v] J.Heyer, 'Agricultural Development Policy in Kenya from the Colonial Period to 1975.' In J.Heyer, P.Roberts, and Gavin Williams [eds.] *Rural Development in Tropical Africa*. [London, 1981], p.104. Heyer's figures for small holder/co-op production are 125,000 acres and 236,000 growers for 1964-5 whereas the Department of Agriculture gives 125,876 and 236,660 respectively.

85 P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

86 P.R.O./C O/544/63/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947.

87 P.R.O./C O/544/64/ Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1948.

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